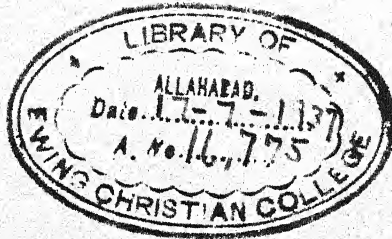


# STARDUST

BY  
D. L. MURRAY



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## A DEDICATION

To all the circus-folk I have met, and to all the great riders it has been my joy to watch — especially Miss Poppy Ginnett, who has revived for our day the thrill of Ducrow's six-horsed "Courier of Moscow"; to all the authorities upon the history and inner life of the show world — especially Mr. M. Willson Disher, author of "Clowns and Pantomimes," and Mr. Edwin P. Norwood, who has given us the facts about "The Other Side of the Circus"; to my friend Mr. Alexander Knox for kind corrections; and to Her who has helped and encouraged me throughout the work, my gratitude is due.

I would ask leave of all to dedicate to them this purely imaginary tale in which no living person figures.

D. L. M.



## CONTENTS

### *Book One*

ENGLAND . . . . .	I
-------------------	---

### *Book Two*

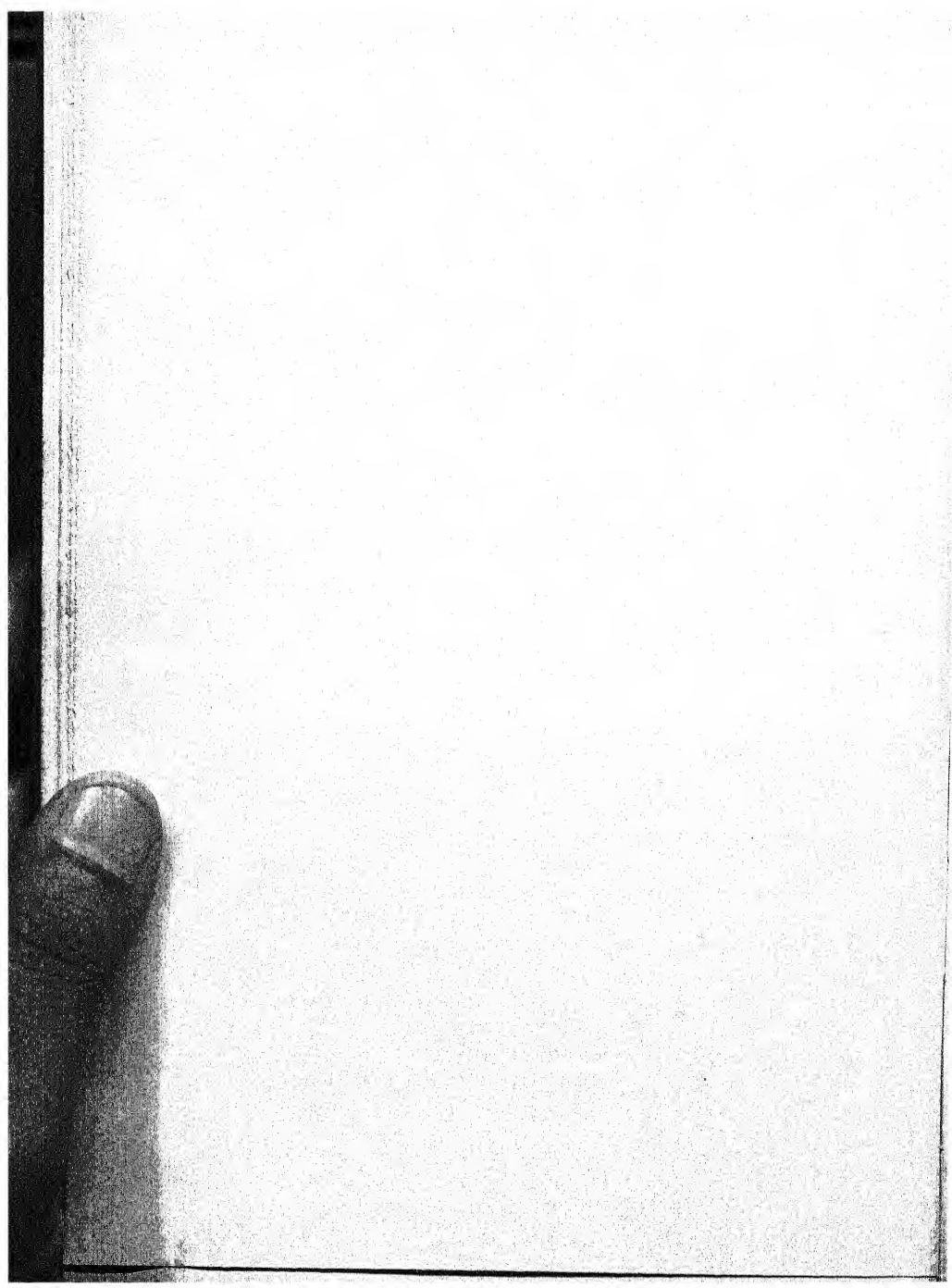
FRANCE . . . . .	179
------------------	-----

### *Book Three*

AMERICA . . . . .	303
-------------------	-----



BOOK ONE  
ENGLAND



# STARDUST

## CHAPTER ONE

### I

BENEATH dimmed electrics the ring, still speckled with the trampled sawdust of the afternoon performance, lay empty in the midst of the oblong hippodrome track. Overhead the slender iron piers and glass curves of the Coburg Palace stretched up into indefinite shadow. Outside, every few minutes, a hum and a gleam of light travelled past the black panes, as a tramcar rocked by on the slope of the promontory from which, for seventy years or more, the derelict glazed mammoth, with its plaster statues and cases of stuffed animals, had loomed spectrally over North London.

Two listless programme girls showed early comers to their places in the green plush stalls, tipping down the seats with little thuds that echoed back from the invisible vaulting. The sound broke in upon the distant shrilling of the boys carrying trays of chocolate up and down in front of the begrimed forest of organ pipes in the apse. There, thinly scattered along the semicircular benches which, in the epoch of the Coburg Palace's Royal glories, had been crowded with choristers and musicians for Handel's oratorios, the low-price public, beneath the glimmering exit signs, now flecked the gloom with the pink ovals of their faces. A buzz of talk went up, and a girl's hysterical giggle, abashing the utterer by its long-drawn resonance, elicited mocking male calls in reply. "Chocolates! Chocolates! Programme of the Circus!" cried the boys again, as the laughter died away.

Two young men came upstairs into the stalls and handed their

tickets to a programme girl, gazing round, as they did so, with a perplexed fascination.

"Does it really exist?" asked one of them, sallow, with black hair low on his forehead and a large black felt hat on his head.

"What would you take to sleep in the Coburg Palace alone?" enquired his companion, fumbling for silver as the yawning attendant offered a programme indifferently to the void.

"And have the Dying Gladiator and Laocöon and all those bilious-looking Makers of the Nineteenth Century leaping from their pedestals for vengeance on a modernist sculptor?" He shuddered. "No, thank you."

"It would be worse, I think," answered the other, "if all the stuffed birds began to flutter at once. But honestly, Franklin," he went on, as they took off their overcoats and settled down, "it *is* some survival, isn't it?"

"Awesome!" Franklin, the sculptor, looked down into the ring, which three melancholy men were now slowly raking over and sprinkling with fresh sawdust, and then away to the patch of colour made by a scarlet-coated groom near the entry to the arena. "A circus!" he murmured. "I don't believe I've seen one since I was five." He glanced round the vacant stalls, the deserted balconies, where small groups of spectators huddled together almost guiltily. "Blayne, this show surely can't be paying," he said. "What's the good of all your writing-up in the evening papers?"

"It's their own fault, — mainly," protested Blayne, a fresh-faced young journalist. "You just can't teach circus people the meaning of publicity." He, too, ran his eye over the empty building. "No, it does look like an iron frost, doesn't it?" he admitted. "I'm sorry for poor old Dufay, obstinate as he is."

"They might at any rate spare you enough light to read the programme," grumbled Franklin. "Ah! That's better!"

The electrics in the great draped circles over the arena had been switched on, and the ghostly population of the apse broke into a long "A-a-a-h!" and a crackle of applause. The mournful hall had waked to colour — the brown tan and the red-rimmed fence of the ring, the flags of the nations festooned on the balconies, the cream and gold façades of the vacant boxes. There was further stir now round the entry, where several more scarlet



grooms were passing in and out through the arch, disclosing by glimpses, as they swung the curtains, a clown's white face and the head of a dappled horse. Up in the bandstand men in military-looking jackets were edging to their places between the music rests; the toot of brass, the gurgle of wood-wind and the rumble of tympana blended as they began to tune. Franklin, after a glance at the gaudy cover of the programme, proclaiming: "Dufay's Grand Circus and International Equestrian Constellation", turned the leaf and studied the numbers.

"Are these the people you brought me to see?" he asked, pointing to the announcement: —

## THE ONLY RIXEN-VAUGHANS.

World's Eccentrics

in

"The Goblin Picnic."

"That's the act," assented Blayne. "It's not mere clowning, Franklin! It's drama! It's genius! My lord, what a comedian Joe Rixen might make on the regular stage! Or, I don't know — perhaps I ought to say tragedian. Have you seen the *Spreuerbrücke* at Lucerne? Of course you have. Well, it's that dance of grinning Deaths that Joe Rixen always brings back to me. He turns me cold, and yet there are fools who guffaw and laugh all through his turn. . . . But look! Here's old Dufay himself!"

A short, stout man in evening dress, with very bandy legs, was making his way towards them along the edge of the arena, smiling up at the journalist, as he came, with an almost propitiatory air.

"Evening, Mr. Blayne, glad to see you here." The circus proprietor grinned nervously through his moustache, showing his few scattered teeth. "This your friend, Mr. Frank? Glad to meet *him*, too. How-de-do, Mr. Frank—*Franklin*, is it? Sorry! My mistake! . . . Any of you artistic gents, Mr. Franklin, always welcome. Somehow seems as if the artists and littery fellows were our best friends nowadays. I don't know what things are coming to, and that's a fact."

"Business seems rather weak, Dufay," remarked Blayne.

Dufay flinched.

"Weak, old boy, isn't the word. It's bloody, begging your pardon, Mr. Frank. Yes, it's a fair count-out, this time," he muttered into his moustache. "Why can't you do something for us, old man?" He turned querulous eyes on Blayne. "You gents of the Press, always wanting passes, ain't you, but I never see a line that helps us afterwards."

"Oh! Come, Mr. Dufay," retorted the journalist sharply, "you can't say I don't do my bit, yes, and a bit of overtime. Did you see the *Echo* last night? The best part of a column!"

"No offence, old boy! None intended and none taken, I hope." Again the manager seemed to flinch deprecatingly. "I only wish the rest were as good to us as you are. But I must be off behind."

The band had rattled brassily into the Repasz March.

"So long, Mr. Frank, see you afterwards, perhaps? The bars at this blasted P.S.A. Museum close at 8.30 and that don't help us any, either, I can tell you. But if you and Mr. Blayne care to come round in the interval, there's a bottle of Johnny Walker in my quarters."

"How's Madame?" cried Blayne, as Dufay turned to go.

The manager paused with a grimace.

"Her rheumatics are plaguing her again, somethink cruel. She says it's torture to her to sit on a horse, and I believe her. But she was never one to give in for ailments, as you know, Blayne; and our Georgy looks after her as much as she can."

"Is Miss Georgy in the show to-night too?" Blayne fluttered the leaves of his programme.

Dufay smiled indulgently.

"Oh! little bits of slangs. Nothing worth your noticing, Mr. Blayne."

"Why not? Why do you never give your own daughter a chance, Dufay?"

Dufay shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it's hard to say just why. Her mother gets real angry with me sometimes about it. But I've always been averse from her appearing at all. Why should she? She's had schooling, you know, with the French Sisters at Norwood, four years. Quite a little lady! I didn't mean her to have to work for her living. But,

whether that was wise . . . now . . . I'm sure I don't know. . . . Look here, boys, I *must* be running."

He shambled hurriedly away on his little bandy legs, as the dappled horse was led into the ring, carrying on his broad back Miss Lucille, a short, stocky girl in silk tunic and tights. She passed her legs from side to side as he ambled round the circle with a regular dipping motion of his arched neck; swung to the ground and vaulted up again; then threw a somersault from his croup onto the tan. There was a little applause as she curtsied to the audience, while a mob of clowns burst through the curtains, and, dividing into two lines, began to run opposite ways round the top of the ring-fence, meeting at last in a noisy collision.

Franklin was pleased at the jet of colour they made, their white faces, daubed with vermilion crescents, emerging from costumes of striped red and indigo cotton, extravagantly flowered yellow silk, pale-blue satin spangled with silver, shimmering green lizard scales,—a glittering medley relieved by the incongruous dilapidation of one or two figures in draggled black tailcoats and crumpled top hats. Then his eye went back to the little equestrienne in the centre of the ring, pulling up the heel of her sandal.

"Oughtn't she to jump through paper hoops?" he asked.

"My dear chap, you're ages out of date! That belongs to the Astley period. We go in for something more gymnastic nowadays."

The band crashed, a signal for the clowns to vanish in a receding tumult; and the horse, stripped of vaulting pad and bridle, started to gallop swiftly round the ring, while the thick-set girl, with shrill shouts, ran at him from the centre, landing intrepidly on his back, first astride and then upon her feet, bending over to urge him forward ever faster by fanning his wild mane. A burst of warmer applause flickered and expired as Miss Lucille ran back at the end to take her call, skipping two or three times into the air and kissing her hand in acknowledgment. Then came an awkward pause, during which the clowns stood whispering by the ringside.

"Something's wrong with this show," said Blayne. "This isn't Frederick George Dufay's style. I wonder what's up."

"There's a sketch there," exclaimed the artist, a few minutes

later, and fingered in his pockets for a pencil. A wire-walker, looking like a great purple butterfly as she poised and darted with a black and gold Japanese umbrella in her hand for balance, swayed on her quivering silver thread. Franklin drew on the inside of an envelope he had torn open and flattened. "Why didn't I bring some crayons for colouring," he grumbled.

"Let's look," said the journalist. "Don't throw it away!" He stooped and retrieved the crumpled sketch that Franklin had thrown down between the seats. "My God, what a line you have, Franklin!" he ejaculated as he smoothed it out.

"Rot! I'm a sculptor with a colour heresy. I'm not a draughtsman at all. Keep it, of course, if you want to." He laughed as Blayne treasured the sketch away in his pocketbook.

"I believe," said the journalist, "that if you only threw a pencil at a sheet of paper, something palpitating with life would come out on it."

The sculptor laughed.

"Life, eh? Well, after all, that's what we fellows ought to go hunting. It's the one thing that matters. And the misfortune is," he went on, fidgeting in his seat, "that your crowd here, old boy, are dead, utterly dead, ghosts from an Early Victorian picture book. Why, Blayne, they don't even believe in themselves. Listen!"

In the ring, the clowns, Watts and Cascatelle, were going through their *entrée*. Watts was an elderly, podgy Englishman, with a whitened face like that of a baby about to cry, clad in pink silk with black cats ramping over his back and legs; Cascatelle, a starveling Frenchman with a gash of a grin, abysmally *décolleté*, above a trailing frock coat with check trousers and huge white spats. They were burlesquing William Tell and the Apple with a giant wooden crossbow, and their cries echoed lugubriously up to the gloom-enshrouded roof.

"All dead," reiterated the sculptor, as the clowns faded out of the arena. "Hullo, what's this?"

Three horses were galloping along the elliptical racing track. On the first two rode cowboys whooping and twirling ropes, on the third a cowgirl, astride, in a fringed brown skirt and studded gauntlets. The cowboys slipped off; and while one, after drawing a rifle from his holster, busied himself with setting up a target in

the centre of the ring, the other began to twist his rope in living spirals. The third rider sat still on her horse watching.

"Why, it's little Georgy!" cried Blayne suddenly.

"Which? Who?"

"Dufay's daughter."

"Little Georgy's pretty big," observed the sculptor. "Getting near a six-footer, I should say. Sits that great bay well, don't she?"

A fusillade from the marksman in the centre interrupted him. The tall girl on the bay swung freely round in her peaked saddle, and with one leg thrust forward watched the hits and misses with keen interest.

"Looks a jolly kid for all her size," Franklin's little black eyes twinkled agreeably. "Is the manager's daughter only here to look on, though?"

His question was answered as he spoke. The rifleshooter laid his gun aside and unhitched a rope from his saddle. His companion signalled to the girl and with a slight, supple movement she set her horse to a canter. As she swept past the cowboy, he whirled the rope over her horse's neck; then, on her return, the other caught her saddle horn. To and fro she cantered obediently from roper to roper, smiling not at the audience but at the boys working with her. Each time the coil spun and fell around her waist or arm or neck, she checked the bay short and lifted the loop with an easy gesture.

Blayne, a trifle bored, was gazing up at the tangle of trapeze ropes drooping down from the shadows overhead into the glare of the lights, when he heard Franklin say:

"I want another envelope." He searched in his pockets. "Oh! Damn! I haven't one! Blayne, can't you provide the back of a bill, at least?"

"What for?"

"It doesn't matter really; but I'd like to catch your Miss Georgy's seat. Look, there she goes again!" He leaned forward to watch. A faulty cast of the rope caught the bay horse a smart flip on the nose, and it reared. "By jove!" cried the sculptor, as the girl bent towards its neck. "She's got the very lines of the Epidaurus Amazon — if only that lady had a head. Look how she flows into the horse!" He traced curves with his thumb.

"Georgy's not a real circus rider, you know."

"Helluva lot that spells to me, boy! Tricks are your pigeon."

Blayne, struck by the warmth of his tone, began to watch the girl with more interest. He had not seen Georgina Dufay for six years and could not clearly remember her looks. He caught a glimpse of short yellow curls tossing and a partial sheen of wiry gold as she whirled for an instant under a ray from one of the great, hooded lights. Now she came thundering by, close to the barrier, and he craned forward to make out her features; but, unexpectedly, grasping the saddle horn with her hand, she swung down from view beside the flank of her horse, sailing smoothly back into her seat a few paces farther, and waving a handkerchief she had picked up. The scanty audience applauded and Blayne saw her head thrown back with what he took for the flash of a smile.

"Movement!" cried Franklin enthusiastically, pummelling him in the ribs. "Movement! — and we poor devils of clay-punchers can't get beyond rest."

The rodeo performers, their feats ended, swept round the track, bowing hat in hand, and disappeared. The next minute Dufay himself, his cheeks and eyebrows heavily made up against the electrics, waddled into the centre of the ring, carrying both a long and a short whip. Behind him, grooms led in a string of twelve white Arabs, graceful as dream princesses with their curved necks, drooping manes and fastidious high steps. A second string of blacks followed, rivalling the first by their dark sheen and regal paces. In a moment the ring became a tossing sea of plumed heads, fiery eyeballs and shining flanks. Standing in the centre and ordering the lovely commotion, the grotesque and rather subservient little man who had gossiped with them before the opening took on a novel dignity. His long whip cracked imperiously against the darting caprices that led now this, now that dainty mutineer to waver, champing, out of line or to break circle, kicking up slim pasterns and swishing tail.

"Ahmed!" he would cry in a guttural, magistral voice, "Ahmed! Moustir!"

Suddenly the whole hippodrome was plunged in blackness, and little electric torches, set in the caparisons on the horses' fore-



heads, glowed out in a bobbing crisscross of elfin lamps, to which the pad of hoofs and the deep, excited breathing on the tan played a more stirring accompaniment than the orchestra's. From all parts of the house rose a thin clapping and cheering, swelled by a hollow thunder of stamping feet, as it might be the wraith of a great audience enraptured. Then, as the lights flashed out again, Dufay, running forward on his bent legs, flourished both his arms. Immediately the full array of noble shapes reared up around him, with flying manes and forelegs beating the air. Three times, shaking his long whip, he set the great wave foaming and cresting above his head; then turned and bowed low to the audience, as the horses danced joyously out of the arena to the care of their grooms.

"Chocolates! Chocolates! Souvenir of the Great Circus!" chanted the boys up by the dim Organ; and, as the sparse occupants of the stalls rose to stretch their legs in the interval, the sense of emptiness and failure spread again over the resounding nave. Once more in the flat silence the hum and gleam of the passing tramcars was noticeable.

2

"Shall we go round?" asked Blayne, and, making their way along the front row of stalls, they passed through the curtains, which the old head groom held apart for them, smiling at the journalist. They found themselves on a space of concrete floor, coated with tan and marked by horse hoofs, beyond which wooden stabling had been built. Grooms passed in and out of the stalls, whistling, some with large baskets of oats in their arms for the liberty horses whose work was done. Two men stood talking in the faded pink coats they were to wear for the hunting-scena *Tally-Ho!*; the fat clown, Watts, freshly attired in silver-sleeved tunic and crimson silk trousers, scowled through the artificial hilarity of his paint at a page boy who had annoyed him; close to the entrance arch a family of Turkish tumblers — bulky father and mother with children of dwindling sizes — stood wrapped in dressing gowns to protect their wasplike black and yellow costumes.

Near by, a temporary office had been made of matchboard partitions and here Blayne tapped on the door and entered.

Frederick George Dufay, still in his rouge, with a shiny top hat on the back of his head, was sitting at a roll-top desk, which, with a couple of cane-bottomed chairs, a cupboard in one corner, and a long whip with a green and gold bridle piled in another, was all the furniture of the room. Across one wall stretched an enormous poster, depicting a woman in plumed hat and low-necked evening dress, leaping a white horse over chimney pots beneath a laughing moon.

"Come along, old boy, come along!" cried Dufay, as Blayne's head appeared. "Walk right in, Mr. Frank!" His former gloom seemed to have melted into an agitated gaiety; the applause that had greeted his liberty horses had given a fillip to his spirits. "You heard 'em, Blayne?" he asked, as he unlocked the cupboard and took out a bottle of whiskey, with a syphon and glasses. "You heard 'em? . . . Say when, Mr. Frank . . . what, no more really? . . . Well, you see, I *can* hold 'em if I get a chance! Here's us!" He wiped his lips jerkily with a magenta silk handkerchief and refilled the glasses. "Yes," he went on, "I'll pull through, yet, you'll see. The Press won't help me any . . . I know *that* by now, Blayne . . . but Frederick George Dufay, Mr. Frank, the name's known from Penzance to Inverness, and London won't beat it, as you'll find, and everybody else too."

The visitors were taken aback by his unprovoked vehemence.

"Is Madame down?" asked Blayne politely.

"No, old man, not just now. Begs to be excused and knows as an old friend you'll understand. She has to be massaged, would you believe it, Mr. Frank, every show before her act; couldn't sit in the saddle otherwise. She'd like to shake hands with you afterwards, Blayne."

"I'm sorry Madame Dufay suffers so much," said the sculptor. "We've been looking forward to her performance this evening."

"And well you might, Mr. Frank. Madame Dufay's *haute école* is *haute école*, not a horse kicking its heels up behind like a donkey on Hampstead Heath — eh, Blayne? She was one of Imperiali's pupils originally, Mr. Frank, and now she trains all her own horses, — not like those converted chorus girls with one eye on



my lord in the box, while their bloody spur's making a crossword puzzle all over the poor brute's belly. Madame Dufay's a rider, born in a waggon and cradled on a horse's back; no, nor not ashamed of it, neither!"

"No need, surely," assented the sculptor. "I see," he added, "that your daughter has inherited the gift."

"What, Georgy? Half a minute, old man. Here, Potts!"

The ringmaster, a tall, lean-jawed personage in a blue tail coat with brass buttons, had just gone by the door of the office, and the manager hurried out after him. The young men presently followed, and waited while he finished giving some orders with gesticulations of both his short arms. The space leading to the arena was now crowded with performers and assistants preparing for the second part of the show; and in the centre of a group Franklin noticed Georgina Dufay, still in her cowgirl dress, playing with her whip and pivoting freely on her heel as she laughed and talked.

Dufay returned to his visitors.

"So you actually picked out little Georgy, did you?" he resumed in a condescending tone. "Perhaps you or Blayne here can tell us what to do with that gal. I tell her, Madame tells her, we can't make a rider—you understand, not what *we* call a rider—out of her at her age. I put her through the first practices when she was a tiny kid, but then she broke off to go to school. She can't see that you can never make up what you miss at that age. She makes me tired saying, 'Dad, I must have to do with horses.' 'What can you do with horses except fall off 'em?' I asks her; but it's not a bit of good. Not a bit. She just goes on, 'Dad, I must have to do with horses.' So, to keep her quiet, I let her have a little part in *Tally-Ho!* the spectacle at the end to-night. She deserves something, after all; she's a good girl."

"With talent too, I think, Mr. Dufay." The sculptor was smiling but obstinate. "She mayn't be a rider in your sense as a circus expert, but, by gad! she is in mine, as an artist."

"Yes, looks well on a horse, don't she?" said Dufay with sudden gravity. "That's something. Oh, I'll admit that's something."

He turned round and saw his daughter in the group a few yards away.

"Georgy!" he called curtly, and the girl swung round at the sound of his voice, and came straight to him with the manner of a child trained to prompt obedience.

"Georgy," said her father with the same brusqueness, "I want to introduce you to two gentlemen here, Mr. Blayne — oh, but you met him before, didn't you? — and Mr. Frank — Franklin, of course, how stupid of me — Mr. Franklin, an artist."

Georgina Dufay shook hands with self-possession. Franklin felt the look of candid grey eyes, which struck him by resemblance and contrast to the streaked and watery grey pupils under her father's tufted eyebrows.

"Here's Mr. Franklin, Georgy, says you'll make a big star — some day," went on Dufay with patronising raillery. "What do you think about it?"

"I hope he's right," answered the girl, and then gave a clear laugh as if at some recognised absurdity. "Persuade Dad to let me go on trying, though, if you can, Mr. Franklin," she added, still smiling but with a wistful signal in her eyes.

"Don't waste time on him, Miss Georgy," interrupted Blayne. "I'm the one that makes stars; he only makes models. Let me interview you at once." He brought out his fountain pen with a flourish. "Now, first of all, were you born at a *very* early age? . . ." The two of them began to exchange chaff with the freedom of old friends, though Georgina had been only fourteen when Blayne last saw her.

Franklin turned to her father.

"I do make models," he said, "and do you know, Mr. Dufay, my models sometimes advertise the sitter quite a bit."

"'Course they would, old boy. It's like that poster over in the office, isn't it? Did you notice it when we were in there? Forain drew it for Madame over in Paris when she was just beginning . . ."

The sculptor interrupted.

"Well, may I try a model of Miss Dufay, then? When would she be free for a sitting or two?"

"You don't mean it, Mr. Franklin?"

"I do, indeed."

"Get along with you. You'll be turning the poor kid's head round next."

"Only in clay, on my honour, Mr. Dufay."

"Well, I really dunno what to say. . . . Hullo, what's the matter?"

The old head groom had hurried up with anxious eyes. He almost pulled his master aside and began to whisper to him. Franklin saw the circus proprietor go ashen under his make-up.

"They 'aven't!" he shouted; then, as the old groom went on whispering, he moaned:

"My Gawd! My Gawd! Where are they?" and in answer to a gesture, dashed away, his bandy legs twinkling, towards the doors in the west transept of the Palace. His aged servant hobbled at his heels.

Franklin, in distress, plucked at his friend's elbow.

"Blayne," he murmured, "I think we ought to be going."

"Eh, what?" The journalist swung round. "Where's Dufay?"

"He went off just now. I'm afraid Mr. Dufay has had some bad news."

Franklin spoke aloud, for he could see that the manager's daughter had observed the incident; though Blayne, absorbed in his own gift for humorous flirtation, had failed to notice the striking of the smile from her lips. Bewildered, he looked from one to the other.

"What's up?" he asked. "Is there something wrong really, Miss Georgy?"

She nodded, and, on the point of speaking, abruptly turned her head aside; Franklin saw her eyes agleam with tears. "What a child!" he thought with a pang. In spite of her tall inches, of the strong hand grasping the riding switch, of her boots and spurs, she seemed to him for a moment small and fragile. Blayne was still at sea; then a troubled thought came into his eyes and he gave a low, dismayed whistle.

Franklin took command.

"I think we ought not to bother Miss Dufay any longer, Blayne." He stepped forward to take her hand. "I hope," he said, "that it will turn out after all to be no real bad news. I was telling your father that I hoped you would let me make a model

of you. May I leave you my card, in case you decide, as I do hope you will, to give me the privilege?" He paused, and added with hesitation, "If there's any way I can be of service . . ."

"Of course, Miss Georgy," broke in Blayne breezily. "We're both only too anxious to do anything . . . you know . . . that could help in any little difficulty. See here, I'll try and look your father up to-morrow."

Georgina seemed grateful and made a rueful effort to smile as she shook hands with them.

"What is it?" asked Franklin as they made their way back to their seats. "You know, Blayne?"

"Queer Street, probably," replied the journalist, and settled down with his eyes grimly fixed on the ring, where the Turks were whirling and crying on their circular striped carpet.

3

"Is something big coming?" enquired Franklin presently, as he noticed the red-coated grooms lining up by the entrance. The next moment the ringmaster advanced to the centre and, after a low bow, announced in a voice that rang all over the building.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, we have now the honour to present to you Madame Dufay on her high-school horse Diane, trained by herself. Diane's performance constitutes an unrivalled exhibition of equine intelligence. She is the only horse in the circus ring to-day that will waltz, tango and fox trot to music at the word of command. Ladies and Gentlemen, Madame Dufay!"

The band let loose a thunderous chord; the grooms clapped their white-cotton-gloved hands, and the curtains over the entrance arch were rolled back and lifted in folds. They framed a figure that seemed of giant height, crowned as it was by a tall silk hat and lengthened by a sweeping skirt, seated on a big chestnut horse. It might have been some ancient idol enshrined. The band broke into a majestic march, and the horse, with the goddess swaying gently in time to its walk, picked its way with delicate high steps into the ring. Then, while the grooms closed the barrier, it began to canter rhythmically round the circle.

Franklin closely studied Georgina's mother. Her tall, still slim

figure, accentuated by the waist of her old-fashioned habit, sat erect to the point of stiffness in the sidesaddle, giving a curious, almost chilling, effect of dignity. The face was that of an elderly woman, hollow-cheeked in spite of thick rouging, with piercing, black eyes and a straight, stern mouth. A mass of dark hair was tightly coiled round her head to support her curly-brimmed top hat.

The chestnut, with the same rhythmical regularity, was breaking pace, changing step, throwing its silky haunches to right and left, and moving sideways round the ring in obedience to changes of the music. With ceremonious parade it lifted elegant, white-stockinged forelegs in the antique etiquette of the Spanish walk and trot. Finally, after treading backwards several paces, it halted in the centre and sank on its knees, without disturbing by an inch the upright poise of its rider.

The grooms applauded afresh, and the audience, puzzled but acquiescent, joined in. Madame Dufay gave a glittering smile; bent her head a little; and, with a touch on the reins, brought Diane to her feet again. The band began dance music with a strongly marked rhythm, and the docile creature executed a variety of steps, through all of which Madame Dufay maintained her arrogant impassivity. Her only signs of life were the tiny signals she kept giving, alternately with her whip and with her foot, which faintly rippled the long skirt as it moved. Then the band stopped with a clang of cymbals, and the ringmaster stepped forward to help her dismount. Gathering up her skirt into her hand, she made elaborate curtsies to right and left, with the same glittering smile to which her eyes made no response.

There was a good deal of clapping; and Blayne suddenly observed an old gentleman in evening dress standing up in one of the hitherto empty boxes and applauding heartily, his hands conspicuous in white gloves with broad black stitchings on their backs. The journalist jogged the elbow of his friend, who was watching Madame Dufay disappear through the curtains, still clutching her skirt, and beginning to limp as she passed from the view of the audience.

"That old Johnny seems to be somebody," said Blayne, indicating the old gentleman, now seated in the front of his box.

He had a touch of the Ambassador in his mien, his evening dress was faultless and his hair a dignified snowy floss; but the face with its wide mouth and cleft chin suggested the actor. It was seamed with minute red furrows, showing almost like stage make-up on his hale complexion.

"I can't place him at all," grumbled Blayne. "What is he? A foreign Minister or a comedian?"

"A rival circus magnate, perhaps," suggested Franklin.

"If so, I ought to know him," answered Blayne, "but, by Jove, I think you must be right, for there's our friend Dufay in conference with him."

The old man had turned his delicate, white head as the manager's face appeared for a moment behind him; then the two retired to the back of the box.

"This intrigues me," murmured Blayne, his eyes fixed on the stranger's empty chair.

"Well, never mind," said Franklin. "If you don't look out, you're going to miss the very turn we came all this way to see."

A country cart had been driven swiftly into the ring, drawn by a shaggy donkey with lolling tongue, and pushed from behind by a youth and a girl in summer clothes. In it sat an aged pantaloon, urging the donkey on with a whip. The cart stopped and the band began to drone out a sinister little march, as a long, lean yokel, wearing a smock and a felt hat like a dustman's, slouched in from the opposite side and took the donkey's head. Just as the old fellow stood up in his seat, the yokel drew the donkey out of the shafts and the cart tilted backwards, spilling the greybeard onto the tan to a thump from the drum. The rustic pulled off his hat to scratch his head, and Franklin gave a little gasp. A long, chalked face, chin awry, lips twisted, nose askew, eyebrows slanting, glaring yellow eyes, and a curved green tuft of hair on a bald, white scalp. Every one in the house gave a start of dismay that finished in a laugh. Alone in the centre of the ring, now, the creature began to make eel-like contortions, throwing handsprings and somersaults with a quivering of all his attenuated form that filled Franklin with a subtle disgust.

Presently the old man, kneeling, offered the girl a nosegay of wild flowers; the bumpkin on his side, proffering, with tongue



hanging down, a huge cauliflower. The maiden rejected it with disgust, and a crimson snake writhed out and clung to his finger. He flung about in horrible convulsions, knocked the greybeard over and smacked the donkey in the face with the snake. The donkey sprang up, making pugilistic passes; the pantaloons intervened; and for a few moments the ring was a pandemonium of blows, cuffs, falls and somersaults—the greybeard seeming to have the worst of each exchange—until the two men fell flat in exhaustion, while the donkey applauded deliriously with its front hoofs.

There was a lull, while the boy and girl juggled with walking stick and parasol; then, amid loud shouting and commotion, the donkey reappeared in the cart, driving the old man between the shafts. The children pursued, horror-struck, and a provision basket rolled out of the cart behind. The yokel pounced upon it; but each pie, joint or bottle that he handled emitted bursts of weird music. At the same time a bull made a stealthy entrance behind him and licked his cheek with a crimson tongue. He turned and flung the provisions frantically at the creature, which backed away to the edge of the ring. The yokel was fanning his face with a huge bunch of carrots, when the bull drew out suddenly to nightmare length, and chased him, bawling wildly, round and out of the arena.

So, before a house limp with laughing, the Bedlamite vision ended, and Joe Rixen strode back to take his call, pulling off his green wig and disclosing a bullet head with grey-lined hair, cropped short. He disappeared with long, spidery strides, reminding Franklin of the Man with the Scissors in the storybook.

"By Jove, Blayne, you're right," he exclaimed; "it's immense, it's terrible. The man's a genius—of a nasty kind." He chuckled. "The donkey was great too."

"That's Seth Rixen, almost as clever as his cousin."

"Is the whole troupe one family, then?"

"No, two. Walter and Ethel, the young ones, are Vaughans. So's old Alf. I wonder he can still stand it at his age. And Joe does knock him about remorselessly."

The programme was drawing to a close. While the flying-trapeze troupe, outlined against the curtain of blackness overhead,

slipped through the air, like large milk-white fishes diving and turning in a tank, the ring hands were busy preparing the arena for the final hunting spectacle, *Tally-Ho!*

"The old Squire looks in a bad way—you can see it even through his make-up," said Franklin, pointing to Dufay, who led the hunt in a more or less eighteenth-century costume, Georgina, stately on her bay, riding beside him, as his daughter. Blayne did not answer—he was staring gloomily and unseeingly into the ring and did not stir until the band crashed into God Save the King.

As he came, with Franklin at his heels, down the gangway towards the exit, he noticed that the box which had held the mysterious old gentleman was already empty. He had stopped by the barrier to look and now caught sight of the ringmaster, a few paces away, directing the removal of the scenery, while the lights overhead were being snapped off in sections.

Blayne leant over and called, "Mr. Potts!"

The ringmaster turned and gave a friendly nod.

"Mr. Potts," asked Blayne, "who was the old gentleman with the nice white hair in the box?"

"Him over there?" The ringmaster jerked a thumb over his shoulder as he approached. "That was Mr. Imperiali."

"Not the *great* Imperiali?"

"Sure enough. Lor', Mr. Blayne, I should have thought you was the one to recognise him straight off."

"Imperiali," Blayne explained to Franklin, "is about the biggest circus proprietor on the whole continent to-day."

"Italian?"

"Originally, I suppose. Parisian more than anything else by now—like Madame Dufay. What was he doing here, Mr. Potts?"

"Can't say, I'm sure. He's stopping in London—" the ringmaster lowered his voice reverently, "at the Savoy, they tell me." Then, after scratching his lean jaw a moment, he beckoned the journalist a pace aside.

"Mr. Blayne," he murmured, "this is shocking news about the Guy'nor, isn't it?"

"What news?" asked Blayne quickly. "Business has been bad all the run, hasn't it?"



"Somethink chronic!" Potts made a disgusted grimace. "But this here looks like a fair smash, don't it?" He eyed the journalist with a kind of anxious appeal.

"Can't say," answered Blayne. "You don't tell me what has happened."

The ringmaster pulled at his moustache, hesitatingly.

"S'pose it's not my business to gossip about the Guv'nor's affairs, specially to you gentlemen of the newspapers."

"I should publish nothing without his leave," said Blayne impatiently. "The Governor's a friend of mine. Come, Potts, what's it all about?"

Potts suddenly became loquacious.

"Right in the middle of the show to-night, Mr. Blayne — would you believe it? — the Guv'nor was served with writs, and I know, though I'm trying to keep it dark as long as I can from my grooms, that the men-in-possession are in already to watch the horses, as well as all the scenery and props."

"Good God, who's done that? The Coburg Palace?"

"They're in it, all right; seems they were frightened for their rent. But it was Finlayson, the Jew, really turned nasty, because of some heavy sums the Guv'nor owed him; so he decides to take possession of the horses as security. That puts the wind up the Coburg Palace Committee. A lot of parsons on the board says they have a duty to the shareholders and the public, and they fire in their writ too. Ain't it a mess?"

"And what'll Mr. Dufay do?"

"Do? What *can* he do? Reckon he'd have done any doing he was able before things came to this. All I know is the show closes down on Saturday — to-morrow — and there's talk about treasury not being forthcoming. Not that I care about my screw at a moment like this. I've been with the Guv'nor fourteen years now, and I'd do more than that to help him out of a hole if I could. But it's all no *bono*."

"It's ghastly. I suppose it's no use my trying to see Mr. Dufay just now?"

"I shouldn't, old man. Talkin's not much good. He's got enough to worry him."

"You're right. Good night, Potts, better luck soon."

"Thank you, Mr. Blayne. I don't see much rift in the clouds, though."

He walked away with downcast head in the deepening gloom. Nearly all the lights were out now and the two visitors had to follow the last little eddies of the audience that were being sucked away down the staircases. Attendants were throwing brown holland sheets over the plush stalls, and overhead the brass shoulder straps of a fireman carrying a lantern gleamed forlornly in one of the empty galleries.

4

Behind, in the stabling, Georgina Dufay, still in her eighteenth-century riding cloak and hat, was watching her horse feed. As she stood rubbing her hand along his back, she heard a hubbub of voices at the entry to the stalls and the words: ". . . in possession" came through to her, awakening again her sickly feeling of terror. She threw her arm over the bay's neck and kissed him passionately on the white star crossed by a wisp of dark mane on his forehead. Then she hurried away towards her parents' dressing room. The company had been dispersed over the windings and nooks of the immense building; and to reach the room she sought she had to mount two spiral stairs of perforated iron, dimly lit, traverse a dizzy gallery overhanging a desert transept, and walk down a low passage. A line of light showed under the door; she knocked twice, and receiving no answer, at length timidly opened it and slipped in.

The picture she saw, unlike anything so far in her experience, struck her like some horrible, incredible stage play. Her mother, dressed in a petticoat and a loose black wrap glittering with gold sequins, was sitting at the dressing table, sobbing into her handkerchief. Her father, in his velvet cap and mulberry-coloured hunting coat, sunk rather than seated on a chair in the middle of the room, was staring at the floor with a look of blank defeat. Never in her life before that she could recall had she seen her mother not dignified, her father not impervious and assured. They had been the twin pillars of her universe, indisputable, irresistible, the answer to all questions, the security against all evils.

"Mother!" she cried out in her terror. "Oh! Dad, what is it? What has happened?"

Her father shot her a dull look; then his head fell forward again without a word. From her mother came a thin, stifled voice:

"What is de maittaire? 'E 'as rueened me, dat is all de maittaire!"

Ruin? What meaning could such a word have for the Dufays?

"But we," stammered Georgy, "we *can't* be . . ." She stopped, realising her futility.

Dufay, with an effort, sat up, planting his hands on his knees.

"Best tell her, Amalia; she's got to know."

"Yes, tell 'er!"

Amalia whirled round from the dressing table, lowering her handkerchief and displaying vindictive eyes, empurpled at the lids with weeping.

"Tell 'er 'ow you 'ave rueened me. Tell 'er de good fad'er she 'as."

Dufay clenched his fists, and at the haggard look that came over his bull-doggish face, Georgina was carried away by a wave of compassion.

"Mother, don't," she cried, running to him and throwing her arm round his neck. "Can't you see you're hurting Dad?"

"Never mind, girl." He pushed her arm from his shoulders. "It's true enough. Our show here has been a frost. I had to borrow heavily from Finlayson before I could pay the Palace their deposit and open. Salaries have been enormous" — Amalia gave a scornful choke — "well, at any rate, for a man like me; the Rixen-Vaughans alone take eighty each week. Receipts have barely paid the electric bill. Finlayson's just been watching, I believe, like the dirty old spider he is, for his chance. Anyhow, he sent his men in to-night; and, getting wind of it, the Coburg Palace Committee put in their bums too. I ought to have cut my losses after the Christmas holidays, but I hung on and on, hoping each week to have some stroke of luck. Now I'm out."

"Dat is like you!" raved Amalia, beating her slim hands on the table. "Always you must do too moch. You must be ambeetious. You knew you were only a second-class man. Why could you not

keep to your tenting and leave us, Georgette and me, our bread? What shall we eat now, I ask you? *What shall we eat?*”

“Well, Amalia, I thought we deserved to get to London. I’d thought it ever since I married you.”

“D’en to marry me was at de beginning your rueen, as it is now mine.” She broke off abruptly. “And to t’ink dat Mr. Imperiali was on ’is knees, on ’is knees, for t’ree years to me to marry ’im, but I would not ’ave ’im.”

“Imperiali!” snarled Dufay. “Yes, he’s always ready for a free box to see you, but will he help us? I pleaded with him to-night. I fairly begged him to advance only a couple of thou. — what’s that to him? — on any terms he liked, to tide us over this mess. Would he, the smooth-faced old humbug? Not a bob; he’s a bloodier Shylock than Finlayson.”

“You tried to borrow money from Mr. Imperiali?” wailed Amalia from behind her wet handkerchief. “You ’ad no right to do it, to ’umiliate me so.”

“It wasn’t worth doing it. Imperiali never in his life thought of anybody but No. 1.”

“’E would have t’ought of ’is wife, if I had married ’im. ’E would not have let me and my child starve upon de streets.”

“Now, stow that!”

Dufay leaped from his chair, breathing fiercely. Then he stopped short before the frightened face of his daughter.

“Georgy, clear!” he said in the tone in which he would have given an order to a horse or a dog. “You know all there is to know, now. Get off home!”

Obedience with her was still automatic; she found herself in the dark passage with the door closed behind her. Inside the room there was a silence that appalled her more than if she had heard crying or quarrelling. She ran along the gallery under its dim safety gas jets and sought the spiral stair with feet that stumbled.

In the time that it took her to grope her way to the foot, missing a step once and striking her forehead against the central support, there whirled through her mind a series of pictures. In them saw her mother, regal, censorious, passionate in reproof — Georgy remembered blows when she was a small child, flaying sarcasms when she was old enough to be hurt by them — with

contrasted moods of fondling and crooning, which had reminded her daughter sometimes of the great tigresses she had seen in the menageries, furiously licking and smacking their clumsy-pawed cubs. And then, in contrast, her father appeared to her, as a rule, breezily, coarsely jovial, except when giving her a riding lesson or rehearsing her for a small part, when ill temper gleamed out of all his face and he would roar at her just as he did at the grooms and the other members of his company. This generally ended with his coming up to pull her hair and offer her a little treat or present.

"Come on, now, stop snivelling," he would growl, "we don't all want to be drowned, you know," and would sheer away on his bent legs, quite satisfied that he had put everything right by a careless word or two.

Now she found herself crying aloud in the dark.

"They don't care! I'm nothing to them! They won't let me help them even. I haven't a father or a mother, really."

A surge of pity for them swept over her with salty bitterness as she touched the foot of the staircase and she turned to go back. But she realised at once that they did not want her and it seemed to her now that she was contemplating the catastrophe of two strangers.

So she came, in a dream, to the room on the stable level, where she dressed with Jenny, a groom's ageing wife, who rode in a loud chestnut wig in the hunt and acted as assistant wardrobe mistress to the show.

Late as it was, Jenny still sat on, with a rabbit-skin fur around her neck, ruminating over the little oil stove.

Suddenly Georgina, wearied out, found herself crying with her head on the gentle, elderly woman's bosom. Neither spoke; and indeed Georgina, feeling her strength dissolving in sobs, could have found no power to say much. But she felt the mothering instinct in the gaunt, childless woman who sat patiently stroking her short locks, and after a time she stopped crying, as if the last drop of her emotion was spent.

"You must think me a great baby, Mrs. Merrick," she said at last in a quavering voice.

"You've had a nasty turn, dear," said Jenny placidly, "and

you're not used to these things. A manager's daughter, it's too bad. It isn't as if it was one of us, now."

Her conviction that managers' daughters should be above the vicissitudes proper to herself and her belongings was unquestioning. Georgy felt a little throb of shame and an immense gratitude.

"Jenny, you're a dear," she said, flinging her arms around her neck. "And I ought to be ashamed of myself," she added, "yes, I ought."

She walked to her bare dressing table and began to take off her velvet habit, trying to still the tremor of her limbs and fingers.

"What will your poor papa do, Georgy dear?" asked Mrs. Merrick after a while.

"I don't know any more than you do, Jenny. We close tomorrow, I suppose you heard that? . . . Oh, what will Merrick do?" She swung round from the glass, for the first time, had she known it, considering as a reality the trials of poor people.

"Oh, don't you worry about that, dear; something's sure to turn up. As a matter of fact—I hope you don't think we did wrong—we wrote in to Mr. Worthington at his winter quarters this morning. You see, we'd both heard things were fishy and thought we ought to be looking out for another shop, just in case."

These people, then, had already self-reliantly thought of what to be doing next, while she so far had only sat crying on the floor! A thought struck her.

"Jenny, what about your screw? Will Dad be able . . . oh! it's dreadful to have to doubt it . . . but you know what I mean. I've just two or three pounds of my own in my bag here."

Mrs. Merrick rose, beaming at her.

"Well, now, if that isn't just like you, Georgy!" (Georgy could not remember doing anything of the kind before.) "But you mustn't think of it, my dear! I expect us small ones will get treasury, all right, and if not, well, worrying won't help. You can't get what's not there, I always say."

Footsteps and muttered talk in the passage outside suddenly interrupted them. Then a shrill, cracked voice blew like a squall through the door.



"Not pay?" — It seemed to be, almost ventriloquially, talking inside the room — "Not pay? Tell that to your pink-eyed aunt! Why, I'll drag it out of the old swine's guts with my own hands. By God, I'll choke him! Leave it to me! I know how to make Frederick George squeal if none of the rest of you can."

A heavy weight thumped against the bolted door, making the lock rattle; then the steps padded away.

Mrs. Merrick had jumped up and clutched Georgy's arm; now she stood shaking.

"Joe Rixen!" she whispered. "Oh! Gawd, Joe Rixen! Oh, dearie, be careful, you be careful, do! Promise me!"

"Why, Jennie" — it was Georgina who was the calmer now — "whatever's the matter? He can't hurt me!"

"He's violent, Georgy."

"I'm not afraid of violence." Georgy's head went back in an accustomed movement.

"No, dear, I mean it. That man," she moved over to the stove again, "he just turns me all over inside like. He'll end on the drop; believe me, Georgy, he will."

"I advise him not to try his violence on Dad, that's all," answered Georgina, pulling her plain blue felt low on her brows.

Unconsciously she felt a return of her old confidence in her all-powerful father, who had pitched a drunken groom nearly twice his height out of the ring at rehearsal and had walked into a lions' den with a light whip and thrashed a frenzied beast that was clawing its trainer. She gave a last glance in the little mirror and came over to bid Jenny good night. The older woman was still shivering, and a spark of terror in the depths of her eyes unexpectedly kindled in Georgina a running flame of fear. She sprang back with a cry and looked over her shoulder.

"Oh, don't, Jenny, please!" she exclaimed. "I've had enough frights for to-night."

They stared at each other for a moment in bewilderment; then Jenny forced out a laugh.

"Seems to me we've both got the doo-da's," she said. "It's been a trying evening, hasn't it?"

Georgina hugged her.

"I must be going, Jenny," she said. "You've done me good, dear."

"Well, keep a good heart up, that's all. See you to-morrow morning at treasury, eh? We'll hope for the best till the worst pops out."

Georgy went out of the dressing room along a dark passage and saw before her the little red lanterns shining in the stables. On a sudden there came over her a longing to say good night to the horse who had carried her so often and so surely, and had never made a mistake of his own to earn her an oath from her father or the sardonic crack of his whip that galled even worse. She knew the stall where Knight was kept and went straight to it in the shadow. As she went into it she heard the clinking of his head chain and made out his tall shape wrapped in the warm cloth she had helped the groom to throw over his back. His large, mild eye with its deep-blue sheen turned on her suddenly, as she edged her way along the wall to him, and he tossed his head in welcome.

"Knight, darling," she murmured, burying her face in his mane and inhaling the healthy smell of his lithe body. "They can't take you from me. No, they can't, Knight, can they?"

He whinnied gently, as if in reassuring answer, and she fondled his soft nostrils tenderly.

"'Ere, what's all this?"

Georgy turned and saw the yellow haze of a lantern in the passageway outside the stall.

"Come out of that," repeated the voice, "will you?"

Georgina, in a flare of rage, strode out of the stall and confronted a short man in a black bowler. He did not raise it.

"Miss Dufay, ain't it? Well, what might you be doing in there?"

"Who are you, please?"

"Who am I? Well, as you don't seem to know, I happen to be in possession in these stables, and I ask you what you were doing in there."

She had never been spoken to before in such tones by a man of his class. But she faltered, as it came home to her that his was the strong position.



"I came to see my horse," she said in a voice that shook, however hard she struggled to control it.

"And very pretty too, I'm sure! Only, you see, Miss, it unfortunately ain't your horse any more, no, nor your papa's neither. If you ask me, I should say it was as good as Mr. Finlayson's horse already. Got that?"

She tried to smile.

"I shan't do Knight any harm by going in to say good night to him," she said.

"P'raps, and p'raps not: I've seen queer things in this business. I've seen horses exchanged on the Q.T., and horses doped; yes, and horses poisoned rather than let a creditor get his dues. And so I'm taking no risks, do you see?"

"You don't dare to suggest that I . . ."

"Oh! I suggest nothing. Suggesting ain't what I'm paid for. I'm paid to keep a strict eye on these horses. So there's the way out, Miss, and I expect your papa's at home already, wondering where you are."

Georgy turned and rushed away before the trembling that had come all over her anew should betray her to the man. She felt her lip quivering, and panted to herself, "I mustn't cry again, oh, I mustn't cry again."

In a black corner, just beyond the entry to the stables, she knew that there was an empty cornbin on which she had often sat waiting her turn to appear in the show. She stumbled to it and sank down, dislodging as she did so a pile of whips which fell with a clatter that terrified her. She crouched, listening for the step of the broker. But there was no sign of him and she fell back against the wall, beaten. A chill crept over her limbs and she wished that she might huddle away there for ever; that time would stop; that she, at least, might slip away into forgetfulness and die sleeping. She did not want to go a step farther into the new world she had discovered to-night, — sordid, suspicious, cruel.

Then, deep down in her, a little, lucid spark began to shine. It was all real; one could not escape it. She — yes, and her parents too, though one could hardly fit one's imagination to that yet — but she, at any rate, was now one of the utterly unimportant people. Nobody would trouble to be polite to her any more; as

the man had said, she had no longer any horse, probably she had nothing at all of her own. The Merricks ranked above her now; they were trained to a job, knew how to look out for themselves.

She, on the other hand, would have to start at the very bottom. She knew a little of many things but nothing thoroughly, she reflected, scraping her shoe with sudden irritation on the grit of the floor. She had had schooling and not got herself educated; she had lived in a circus and not practised enough to become a rider. Yet now she must look after herself. "If I can't help Mother and Dad," she thought, "I won't be a burden on them." She knew enough about horses, surely, to do some job in a circus; even old Jenny, who knew less, could do that. . . . Work! . . . Fresh scenes and faces perhaps! . . . Freedom! . . . Independence! . . . Surprised, she felt a little thrill at the idea. It beckoned her, almost smiling, for a moment, as an adventure. But no, one could not think of adventure with them upstairs, still in their agony. Anyhow, it was time to take hold of herself. Three times to-night she had cried. That helped nobody and only weakened her. She vowed to herself that nothing should wring tears from her again. And to-morrow she must look for work, just as the Merricks and the other unlucky ones would be doing.

She stood up, and, after hesitating a second, decided not to go out through the stage door by the south front where there might be more brokers to challenge her. Instead, she raised a leg and stepped over a wooden barrier that closed a passageway into the west transept. The doors there, she knew, were guarded all night and the fireman would let her out. Her steps drummed hollowly on the dusty boarding as she strode through the vast, stuffy-smelling darkness, overshadowed by the menace of colossal sculptures. A pale ray from an outside lamp bleached the corner of a bank of evergreens, and she started back with a pounding heart. A man with spidery legs was lurking among the leaves! Then, ashamed, she recognised a bronze Elizabethan worthy in ruff and tights, and forced herself to walk more slowly towards the faint light that showed from the distant doors.

She found that the old Commissionaire had not yet gone off duty, and saw from her little wrist watch that it was still a few minutes from midnight.

"Is that you, Miss?"

The Sergeant, a friend whom she had often tipped for small services, came out of his hutch. He walked to meet her with a look of solicitude on his old face.

"Can I do anything for you, Miss . . ." he was beginning, when he saw her expression under the globe left burning by the glass doors with their drawn blinds. He stopped short, passing a hand over the droop of his grizzled moustache, while a paternal twinkle came into his eyes.

"Good night and good luck, Miss!" he whispered.

Georgina threw back her head and returned his smile.

"Thank you, Sergeant, good night!"

She passed out through the turnstile into the dinginess of the long, winding suburban street. A last car was grinding round the corner downhill with a shimmer of lights. The pavement shone wet and a dash of soft spring rain beat in her face. She turned up her coat collar and went whistling softly down the hill towards her parents' lodgings.

## CHAPTER TWO

### I

DUFAY's CIRCUS closed down the next day, Saturday, and the ensuing week put Georgina's newly found determination to the most grinding test of all, inaction. Her father went to and fro with a grey face, fighting to straighten out his liabilities, eating little and saying almost nothing in his daughter's presence on his return each evening to their lodgings. Her mother took to her bed, her rheumatic pains intensified by nervous collapse, and Georgy tried to be as energetic a sick-nurse as possible, rubbing, measuring out medicine and running to chemists with prescriptions. The rest of the time, when the invalid did not want her, she passed alone in the sitting room of the dreary North London lodging house, her eyes roaming listlessly over the brown-and-gold embossed wall-paper, the statuettes of prancing knights on the mantelpiece, the pillared clock ticking beneath its glass dome.

At sewing she had always been clumsy; and, in spite of her school years, books had stayed a closed world to her, except for a novel or two with which she had whiled away empty hours without excitement. Now, as she crouched on her chair, elbows on knees, following the flowered pattern round the black-leaded grate or blankly returning the black stare of the house opposite, with its soiled BED AND BREAKFAST card framed in lace window curtains, she could see no future at all. What did her parents mean to do? They would not say. What, then, dare she plan to do? She could not think.

Once Dufay had a moment of tenderness.

"I'm sorry for you, girl," he said, turning from the mantelpiece on which he had been resting his head on his hands, after a muddy day's journeying in trams and omnibuses. "I didn't

plan it this way when I was thinking of your future. I always thought I'd make a lady of you — sending you to that good school to be taught manners and all, so that you could marry anybody. I didn't expect ever to see you hard up. I never thought you'd need to do a day's work."

Georgina roused herself.

"But, Dad, I want to start working now. Can't you think of something I can do?"

"You? What can you do?" he asked with rough impatience. "Go into a shop — or be a companion to some old dame? Don't talk silliness, my girl."

Taking his hat off the table, he wandered out into the passage on his way upstairs to his sick wife, and Georgy shrank into herself.

Slowly, from scraps that now one, now the other of them let fall in her hearing, she began to get an idea of what was going on. Finlayson, it seemed, had made good his lien on the horses, Dufay's chief asset, and they were to be sold by auction in about a week. Afterwards there had been a general meeting of creditors to discuss Dufay's remaining effects. A scheme had been drawn up whereby all the company were to receive a percentage of the salaries due to them and the Coburg Palace Committee was to confiscate the deposit and receive fifty per cent. of the balance still outstanding on their rent. But the next day this plan had been imperilled by Rixen, who presented a preposterous demand, not only for payment of the whole of the salary of his troupe till the end of their engagement, but for "expenses", "commissions" and "services rendered" of which he offered no clear account. Georgy was never to forget the strained desperation of her father that evening.

"Dey will not give in to dat villain!" she heard her mother cry through the half-opened door of the bedroom, and then her father's voice, husky and shaking:

"Better for me, Amalia, better for me if they would."

"But why are you so afraid of 'im? What is between you?" she heard her mother's voice and her father speaking soothingly.

For a while it seemed likely that the other creditors, in their anger, would file a formal petition in bankruptcy against the

circus proprietor; but Finlayson, who had good reason for not wishing his dealings with Dufay to be brought to the light of an official examination, again intervened — Georgina did not know this — and brought Rixen to heel by reminding him of a certain promissory note he held against him in his safe. So the negotiations proceeded.

Out of the whole thorny tangle, the one point that embedded itself in Georgina's heart was that the horses were all to be put up for auction. Go to the auction she would, though never before had she thought of going anywhere without parental consent. She simply could not live if she were ignorant of the hands into which Knight was to fall, but she knew neither the time nor the place where the sale was to be held. On the Wednesday afternoon, intent on finding out, she slipped away after the meagre lunch was finished, her mother being asleep and her father vanished since breakfast.

After wandering about the deserted back parts of the Palace for nearly an hour without meeting a friend, she found Mrs. Merrick in what had been their dressing room, tying up a brown paper parcel. From her she learned, at last, that the auction would open at eleven the next day in a covered yard that had once been the stabling of an adjoining hostelry, the Hare and Hounds, but was now let off to a horse dealer. For the convenience of the showmen who would come to bid, the waggons, costumes, properties and bits of scenery that Dufay had surrendered had been brought to the same place, so as to make a single sale of all his property. Mrs. Merrick was sure that there would be a big gathering of circus owners from all parts.

Georgy walked back fast through the biting wind of the March twilight. Tumbled grey clouds smoked at the end of the slate and brick vista, along which the street lamps were breaking into lonely primrose stars. On the blank wall of a house by the railway bridge a dirtied poster showing a clown's red mouth bursting through a paper hoop mocked her with the cry: "Dufay's Grand Circus!" If mother or father had discovered her absence and were to ask its cause there would be trouble, and she still trembled at the bare thought of their anger. She had a latchkey with which she let herself in with a tiny click; the passage was unlit. She felt for



the handle of the sitting-room door, and, entering, took matches from her pocket to light the gas globes. Her father had not been in, anyway, she told herself, as the cheerless room, with a dead fire in the grate, sprang into view; now she must see how her mother did.

Her hand was on the door handle again, when she caught sight of a letter on the table. She paused, with her overcoat swinging from its loop over her shoulder, and then moved slowly to the table to look at the name on the envelope. Written in her father's awkward business hand was the one word "Georgy." Surprised, she dropped her coat on a chair and opened the letter.

"GEORGINA, MY GIRL, —

I leave this for you, as you've the coolest head of the two. When you read it I shall be gone, and take it from me no effort to trace me will be the least scrap of use. I'm sorry to be doing the Johnny Scaparey on you both, but there was no other way. If you want to know why it had to be, we'll put it that the name of Dufay's dishonoured now, and that if I had to go about under it, to be pitied and smiled at by all the old crowd, me, Frederick George Dufay, one day I should find I couldn't put my razor back in the case after shaving. I might have pulled through even this smash in an ordinary way, but there are hounds, Georgy, whose greed a man can never hope to satisfy.

Still, I've done what I could to meet just claims; Willoughby and Markstein, of 120B, Wellington Street, solicitors, have full instructions. That there's nothing left for you two isn't my fault. Your mother has her jewellery; I've never asked for a piece of it in all this agony, and it's worth £300 if a bob. In the summer, when the weather's better, she'll be well enough, I reckon, to work an engagement. If she likes, she can try she knows who; he won't be less anxious to oblige if she goes as a widow, even if only a grass one. I'm tired of all that too. I've been a lonely man always. But if I ever get clear again, I won't forget you, Georgina.

My hand's stiff, holding pens all this week, so this must end it. I used to have great thoughts about what I'd do for you, so as you'd be a credit to your mother and me. Now you must use your own head and what pluck you've got. Burn this when read.

Good-bye,

Your father,

FREDERICK GEORGE DUFAY."

Georgina stood with her breath coming and going in sobs. Then, summoning all her will, she stiffened her frame until she could breathe almost tranquilly again. She must win this first fight with terror, she knew, or be beaten for good and all. She *must* be calm, must not let the ache of pity and apprehension for her father pull her down. The first thing she had to think about was her mother. She went out of the room and tiptoed upstairs to the bedroom. A street lamp outside the window filled it with a faint yellow light in which she could make out her mother's form on the pillows. Asleep?

"Are you dere, Georgette?" said Amalia suddenly, in the hoarse voice her illness had given her.

"Yes, Mother. Have you been asleep?"

"No."

There was a silence.

"I'll light the gas and make you some tea," said Georgy at length.

She crossed to the jet by the fireplace.

"Father's not in yet," she said, feeling her way to her terrible task, as the flame widened.

"Is 'e gone?"

"Gone?" Georgy wheeled round in alarm. "Gone where? What do you mean, Mother?"

"Is 'e gone yet, right away from us? Are we left?"

Georgy stammered.

"Mother, why should you think . . . ?"

"'E 'as gone den. Oh, I can read your face. You cannot deceive me. I 'ave been waiting for dis, for so many days."

"He told you, then?"

"He told me not'ing, evaire. But I knew what was dere in 'im, behind de eyes. I read it plain all de day; at night it breathed from him, softly, softly, while 'e lay sleeping dere, still at my side."

Georgina came to the foot of the bed.

"Since you know, Mother, it's no use trying to deceive you. And I don't think I could have anyhow. Yes, Father's gone — gone — to work for us somewhere. I'm sure he has. Oh, do try not to be too hard on him. He had such a big name, Mother; it was



too dreadful on him to see it brought down. He just couldn't bear it."

Amalia was silent and rigid, hands stretched straight down before her on the quilt, a look of wizened age transforming her face, her black eyes staring, over pouched lids, at some invisible sight.

Georgina threw herself on her knees at the bedside and lifted one cold, irresponsive hand to her lips.

"Mother," she said, "do say something to me! Don't worry so much. I'll take care of you. I'll find a job easily. You'll rely on me, won't you?"

The older woman seemed not to hear her.

"George," she was murmuring, "George, I was a good wife to you. I nevaire looked back. What was done was done. For you I worked. When did I complain? T'ree times I was mod'er to your children, George; de doctors said when my little Francesco died I must do no more. Often, often I 'ave been twisted in pains and I 'ave nevaire stopped from working . . . you needed it. I have gone wit' you — up and down, up and down your cold England in waggons. Od'ers have driven deir carriages in de Bois, od'ers have been riding in de Prater. I 'ave done all for you. Tell me, den, where I 'ave failed."

Georgina could not bear this spectral pleading with the unseen presence of her father.

"Mother, Mother," she cried, "don't think these things. You must put him out of your mind now, for your own sake, for mine. There's only you and me, now; don't you understand? We have to forget the past. We've got to start quite, quite fresh. And, oh! Mother, I'm not afraid. I can take care of you."

Amalia turned uncomprehending eyes on her for a moment. Then she looked away again to the foot of the bed, moving her head from side to side like one who peers through gloom.

"You tell 'im, Georgette," she whispered, "you tell 'im. I was a good wife always, always."

day in a lofty paved yard, glass-roofed and green-walled. By eleven the place was thronged with intending buyers and with the curious public. The men and women in sober clothes gathered round the railings would not have been recognized by the passer-by as the chief showmen of Great Britain and several of its leading ring stars. Here a young clown whose grin convulsed circus tents all over the country stood by in the dark coat and bowler of a City clerk; there a proprietor whose fantastic title haunted the dreams of children might have been taken from his calm eyes and hale complexion for a well-to-do farmer; at his elbow stood a plain woman with large teeth, dressed in a checked ulster, who would that evening, resplendent in Columbine skirts, dance on a bare-backed horse.

There was but little noise, and rather a churchlike atmosphere, about the clean, spacious yard, into which the walls reflected a watery, green light from the ground-glass roof. Just before the hour, Georgina Dufay entered by the sloping cobbled passage from the street. Yesterday's panic had been mastered now. Her mother, after the long rambling monologue, continued for some time in Italian, which had made Georgina fear that her mind was unhinged, had sunk back drowsily again on the pillows; and, after drawing her daughter's head down to her breast in an almost savage embrace, which left Georgina's face covered with her mother's tears, had fallen into a sleep that continued all the night. In the morning she seemed resigned. It was perhaps Georgy's fancy that the grey in her still thick black hair had widely spread; it might have been simply the result of a fortnight without dyeing. Amalia had approved without protest of her daughter's attending the sale, and had even not dissented from her timid hint that she might meet somebody there who would help her to find work.

In the yard Georgy attracted no notice from any one. She had made no professional reputation; and her mother, mingling parental austerity with the resolve to create no rival near the throne of her own handsomeness, had always bought the plainest clothes for her. Georgy's untrimmed navy blue coat, her brown brogues and stockings, might have been chosen to elude attention. Her own looks, moreover, especially when, as now, her hair with its

golden gleams was hidden beneath her hat, had nothing to catch the eye. She was normally rather pale; only on a close observer would the modelling of the firm jaw, sweeping round to the oval chin, the sensitiveness of the tilted nose with its wide nostrils, the steadfast depth of the grey eyes, which surprised at rare moments by a flash of visionary remoteness, exert their fascination. Unaccosted, therefore, she stood in her inner solitude, watching the break-up and flowing away of all that had hitherto made the material substance and unwavering background of her life.

The auctioneer had mounted his pulpit. He was a grave, whiskered man of deep-red complexion, a blend of sporting nobleman and archbishop. He began by explaining that the waggon train and draught horses would be disposed of first; then the costumes and the scenery. The circus stud proper, the most valuable of the lots, would not be brought under the hammer until the afternoon, for the convenience of many patrons who could not arrive earlier.

He went on to read a description of the waggons and carriages, including the two steam traction engines, at the end of which Georgy heard, "Late owner's private travelling waggon, newly redecorated, three compartments, containing kitchen with stove, beds and sitting-room furniture complete", and realized that the citadel of her babyhood was stormed. How often she had enjoyed the sunshine streaming through its open door, as during halts on the road she played about on the floor, and, in spite of prohibition, crawled daringly up and down the back steps unobserved! She had been nursed to sleep on hot summer afternoons by its slow, unceasing swing, watching, till her small eyelids sank in drowsiness, the patches of sky that shone through the high windows and the clusters of leaves that rustled against the panes. At night, with the stove glowing red and roaring softly to itself, the waggon had been the snugest of castles from which to listen, as one burrowed into the blankets, to the wind that rocked it on its great, blue-painted wheels, or the rain that pattered on the roof and hissed through the orifice of the stovepipe. On summer nights owls hooted, and a silver ray fell through the loophole over her tiny bunk, to lie in a witch pool on the dark boarding. Then with

a gentle sigh the forest round about would whisper in her ears and lift her on waves of contentment into dreams . . .

"Forty pounds, then," said the auctioneer, with a sharp tap of his hammer, "and you've a bargain, Sir, that I can tell you."

The draught horses came next and were sharply eyed by the intending bidders as the auctioneer's men brought them, two by two, into the enclosure. A placid old pair, white and dapple grey, had drawn her father's caravan as long as she could remember. They stood now with their backs to her, their heavy manes falling over their faces, and Georgy, with a cruel bitterness welling up within, was glad that they could not see her or try to greet her. She felt as if she had in some way helped to betray them.

"Shetland ponies!" cried the auctioneer. "Good riding or draw small carriages. Trained to simple ring work, liberty and jumping."

Georgy stood on her toes, but could not see these familiar friends over the shoulders of the crowd, though she heard the fairylike dance of their hoofs. Old Bessie was among them, she knew, still active after many years' circus work, and old Bessie's shaggy back was the first she had ever crossed, when she was barely three and hardly had leg enough to straddle over. Long after she had learned to sit bigger and more resistant ponies, she had kept Bessie as her special pet. She would ride her to any meet of hounds she got wind of near where the circus was staying, and the on-lookers would smile to see the now long-legged child in fawn gaiters and velvet jockey cap, urge her miniature charger up steep banks into the very press of the stately riders in pink. Bessie, with a fine sense of the game, would toss her fiery little head, plant her short legs, sidle and caper to give her mistress the credit of handling her before the world. Georgy determined to enquire, if she could, which of the intent men, throwing up hands with sale catalogues in them and clamorously calling figures, had carried off Bessie. Surely any real circus man must see that she was too old now for hard work!

In her pain she had been letting her eyes wander aimlessly round the high cornices of the courtyard, clenching her fists in her pockets. When she looked again towards the auctioneer's stand, the grave, horsey-looking man was gone and his place

taken by a young Jew. They had come to the costumes, with which a firm of stage dressmakers was dealing. Long boards were being set up on trestles and the costumes were being carried downstairs in piles to be laid upon them. The Jew, with his sleek hair and twinkling beads of eyes, proved a facetious salesman, and it was amid laughter and retorts from the crowd that the lots were swiftly worked off — now a set of Roman armour, now two or three tailored riding habits, now a bundle of grooms' scarlet liveries, now an eighteenth-century coat and peruke, now a series of clowns' dresses, each held up for a moment and opened to view by the costumer's assistants. Suddenly Georgy recognised among them a dainty feminine travesty of clown's apparel in pink and pale-blue silk, drawn slimly in with gilt buttons at the ankles, and set off by a ruff of lace and rosebuds. The Jew was at the top of his enjoyment with this, turning over the dress with his splay thumbs and spinning the little blue pointed cap on his forefinger.

"Some of you gents would rather have it filled, I know," he said archly. "I'm very sorry we can't oblige you. But look!" — he shook out the shimmering folds — "better than new, ain't it? Come, Mr. Watts, just the thing for you to wear in your *entrée*."

There was a roar of laughter at the fat clown's expense, during which a question must have been asked, for Georgina heard the Jew answer.

"No, I don't know, Sir, who wore it before." He whipped it round back to front. "Nor behind, neither," he added jocosely.

He did not know who had worn it before; well, she could have told him. It had been made, by her father's special leave, in the wardrobe department, for her to wear at a fancy-dress ball at a school friend's house. She saw again the red-arched hall of the expensive villa where Marjorie's people lived, the festoons of Christmas greenery and the swarm of dancers. Marjorie Duncan she had not now seen for years. Always a worker, Marjorie had left for Germany after matric. to finish her education. She had written, Georgy had answered; but change of tastes and divergent careers had slain this school friendship like many others. Now, for a moment, Georgy asked herself why she had not taken the pains to matriculate; she might to-day have been able to get a clerkship or secretarial post in business. But never had she been

able to sit close to books, and her parents had shown her plainly that they thought learning a useless luxury. Once, when she gained her solitary prize, for reciting poetry (she had been enthralled awhile by the fights and scenery of the *Lady of the Lake*), Dufay had given her a pound and arrogantly carried the gilt-edged volume with its violet ribbon round his company. But he had cared for the distinction, she knew, only as it reflected lustre on himself, and Amalia had watched for an early chance to "knock the conceit out of her."

It was curious, she reflected, that Marjorie had helped her in no way to grow industrious. She had only adored Georgy for doing all the things she could not and dared not do herself. The nervous, spectacled girl, who never played hockey or any other active game, sought vicarious thrills of fear and guilt. She really had been responsible for half the pranks Georgina played — though Georgy would have been mischievous in any case, for the discipline of the Sisters was a joke after her father's voice and whip, and there was ever something about a bodily risk that lured her like a treasure or a lover. Pat to her thought, the hilarious tootling by the Jew auctioneer of the hunting horn used in *Tally-Ho!* brought up a memory. How often she and Marjorie had recalled with shrieks of laughter the day when she had escaped from the riding master — Marjorie sitting the while demurely on her quiet horse at his elbow — had struck across country to a spot where she knew hounds were meeting; and made the unhappy riding-school hack take three stiff fences before he stuck, blown, in a ploughed field, where she was forced to dismount and surrender to judgment.

But that had been nothing to the trouble that followed her far worse exploit during fire practice. While the other girls were gathered round the jumping sheet, she had swarmed up the back of the escape ladder alone, and been seen by the horrified eyes of the Directress of Studies and the Reverend Mother herself, running along the roof of the school buildings to the end where they abutted on the chapel. Thence, after measuring the distance with her eye, she had taken a jump across to the coping of the chapel roof. She had heard screams below as she landed with scraped knees and elbows among frowning stone saints . . . after which



she had begun to wonder why on earth she had done it. It must have been the glimpse of Marjorie Duncan's little squat form dancing enraptured on the lawn underneath that had impelled her to a misdemeanour that nearly procured her expulsion. She would have left the next day, had not Amalia come herself to plead, and touched the Reverend Mother's heart by her genuine Catholic piety.

3

Georgy shook her head and passed a hand over her eyes. How was it that memories came back with such keenness in hours of misery? Surely she had heard with her ears just now Marjorie's sputtering laughter. Like an awakening from sleep, there came back to her again the chill courtyard with its greenish light and faint horsey smell. How long had she been daydreaming? She could not tell; but seeing the red-faced auctioneer back in the pulpit, she realised that the lunch interval must have passed. She looked round, slightly dazed, and saw Mr. Imperiali coming towards her. As usual, he was perfectly dressed, in a heavy frieze overcoat, a silk scarf and a pale grey hat with a black band. There was nothing either flamboyant or theatrical about him as he stood leaning on his ebony stick, looking at her out of his soft, unreadable brown eyes.

"You 'ere, Mademoiselle?" he asked, almost in reproof. "And alone? Where is your mod'er, d'en?"

"Mother's ill in bed, Mr. Imperiali."

"And your fad'er?"

"Father?" She stopped short. "He's gone abroad."

"Abroad?" His brow contracted in amazement. "Is it posseeble? But dat is surely very sudden, Mademoiselle?"

Georgy dropped her eyes to the ground.

"He saw an opening, I suppose," she murmured.

Imperiali changed the subject.

"And does *she* bear up, poor Amalia, your good mod'er, Mademoiselle Georgy?"

"Mother's been splendid," answered Georgina. "I couldn't have believed it, at her age and being so ill."



"Ah! Good! Good!" He seemed, in some detached portion of his being, to be relieved. "And so you 'ave really come here," he went on, "to watch all dis? *Mais, c'est bien triste, Mademoiselle.*"

"Everything's sad for us now," replied Georgy. "I thought I might as well see the last of old friends — my only friends, really."

"Oh! Dat is sad, too," purred the delicate old man. "*Ah! ce pauvre Dufay!*" He shook his flossy white head with a touch of irritation. "*Poverello!*" He fell silent, but did not move from her side, and she felt that he expected her to wait by him.

The important moment of the sale had arrived. Dufay's twelve white Arabs were being shown amid admiring murmurs from that part of the crowd which had not come to buy and so had no motive for reserve. Bidding was brisk and excited, but Georgy did not follow the price. She was noticing how Ahmed, always the flightiest and most fastidious of the string in the arena, was fidgeting with the hostler who held him and trying to back away. He seemed to feel the indignity put on him, rearing up and throwing an indignant eye round the courtyard, as though seeking a rescuer. Georgy could not bear it and turned aside with a choking throat. "*Bon sang! Bellissimol!*" she heard the old man by her side murmur; then, as the Arabs were led away, his voice came to her again through the mist that clouded her eyes,

"Mademoiselle Georgina, what will *you* do?"

She blinked the mists away and confronted the brown eyes with their changing twilight depths.

"I'm looking for work, Mr. Imperiali," she answered, and to answer so, she, the beggared novice, to the prince of circus proprietors, cost her more courage than her wild leap on to the chapel roof had done.

He raised feathery white eyebrows.

"Work? In a circus? Really?"

His tone implied no more than curiosity; he showed neither encouragement nor scorn, and returned to his silence.

The other owners were pressing round now, bidding tensely for Madame Dufay's beautiful *haute école* mare, Diane. Georgy, thinking of a grey-haired woman lying on a lodging-house bed, could not restrain the tears that splashed down on the collar of her coat — her first tear since that night of resolve in the Coburg Palace. She

dried them hurriedly and glanced sideways at Imperiali. He was standing rigid, watching the sale of the lovely creature that had been almost part of the woman he had so passionately worshipped. A notion that had come to Georgina that perhaps he wanted to buy Diane for himself died away as she looked. Imperiali seemed almost defiantly aloof. His silver-knobbed stick swung slowly to and fro behind his back; the broad, cleft chin was thrust forward, the little red furrows of his face deepened by its sternness. What did his expression betoken? Suffering, anger, vengeance — could it really be that, and if so, upon whom? — or simply the stress of memories? Who could tell? He was masked, this man, to the point of inhumanity; and suddenly, as she watched him, Georgina felt her courage run out of her. The faintness of hunger — she had not lunched and had only crumbled a piece of bread with her cup of tea for breakfast — depression, hopelessness at the sight of the unconcerned world — all swept over her at once, overturned her inner soul and crouched stiflingly upon it. She would have run away, if her shaking legs could have borne her. But she could only lean against the wall, her head thrown back, this time not in confidence, but in defeat, and stand propped there with her feet pressed together, battling more and more feebly with faintness. What kept her conscious was not any hope but the piercing dread of a worse pain than any she had yet encountered. Soon now, very soon, they must come to the selling of Knight, and she could neither bear to see it nor find strength to escape from it. Already, through her closed lids, she saw him in her imagination towering over the circle of heads round the enclosure; his gentle eyes beneath the white star moving slowly from side to side as he searched, continuously, patiently, for her — for her who should save him but could not do so.

"Oh! God!" she sobbed under her breath. "Oh! God! I can't bear this!"

"Mademoiselle!"

A hand like an iron claw gripped her arm. She opened her eyes and saw Imperiali glowering at her.

"You are not to go down! Do you 'ear? You shall not faint, I tell you. Where is your courage, eh? Bring it all now. Will you obey me, please?"

Men and women of all nationalities and natures had obeyed Imperiali in their angers, their accidents and their despairs; it was no wonder that Georgy could not resist him. She stood upright, like a daunted schoolgirl, pale and choking, but clear-headed.

"Ah! But dat is better; come!" The blaze of brown lamps faded from his eyes and a smile broke over his face, lifting his cleft chin. "Tell me, why should you give up now?"

Her only answer was to turn her quivering face towards the sale ring. The horrible scene of her fancy was at that moment being acted. There stood Knight, appealing direct to her with sad eyes across the crowd, while the auctioneer could be heard clearly saying:

"This admirable saddle horse, sixteen hands, ring-trained and also for *haute école*."

"Half-trained for *haute école*," put in a swarthy-browed, ruddy man with a hook nose. It was Worthington, a big travelling owner and a friend of Dufay's, who had seen Knight at work.

"Well, it's my belief, Mr. Worthington," said the dealer, "that there's very little needed to finish him."

"That's as may be," retorted Worthington. "Anyhow, I'll give thirty-five."

"Forty!" put in Bray, Worthington's chief rival on the road.

"Make it forty-five, Mr. Worthington," coaxed the auctioneer, to this encouraging new voice.

Worthington shook his head.

"Forty-five, then!" piped a shrill voice. It was Smilo, the clown, who sometimes did horse acts.

"Forty-five," repeated the auctioneer, delighted. "Any advance on forty-five?"

"Fifty!" growled Worthington, who had just been listening to a report whispered by a trusted groom.

"Fifty," chanted the auctioneer. "Any advance on fifty? Mr. Bray, Sir? No advance on fifty. Going for fifty pounds; for the last time, going for fifty pounds. . . ."

Georgina uttered a heart-broken wail and Imperiali, who still clutched her arm, felt her tremble all over.

"Yes? Did somebody speak down there?" asked the auctioneer

eagerly. Heads were turned, and Imperiali stepped in front of the shrinking girl, as several voices uttered his name.

"Come! Mr. Imperiali," pleaded the auctioneer, "you'll give fifty-five pounds, I know."

For an hour-long second the Italian paused; then curtly nodded his head.

"Mr. Imperiali, fifty-five!" triumphed the auctioneer.

"Well, then, sixty," said Worthington, who detested foreign proprietors.

"Sixty pounds, Gentlemen! This is more like business. What advance on sixty?"

"Sixty-five," snapped Imperiali.

"Seventy," sang out Worthington in a jeering tone; and suddenly the duel between the two became a fierce international conflict — England against Italy — in which sane commercial values were forgotten.

To Imperiali's shrill cry of "Seventy-five!" Worthington riposted with a bid of eighty; then unexpectedly Bray, a little flushed, plunged back into the battle, offering eighty-five. For answer Imperiali turned on his heel and began to walk with his stately step out of the courtyard. A loafer in the throng whistled a stave of "Rule Britannia," and he wheeled round in a fury, gesticulating, and shouting,

"Ninety!"

There was a moment's tense silence, for the experienced men who were listening were baffled at this rocketing up of the price; then Worthington was just heard to growl:

"Ninety-five!"

Somebody gave an awed whistle, and a derisive voice cried:

"Play up now, the Macaroni Wanderers!"

"Order, please, Gentlemen!" said the auctioneer severely. "You've heard Mr. Worthington, one of the finest judges of horse-flesh in England, offer ninety-five pounds for this magnificent, fully trained *haute école* horse. Now which of you is going to let me call the hundred for you?"

He leant out of his pulpit towards Imperiali, his hand to his ear as though he had heard him speak, but wished to confirm it. The Italian scowled at him; then shot a furtive look at Georgina.

She was standing with lips parted, her eyes shimmering from within, waiting as if for a god to speak.

"Well, sir?" wheedled the auctioneer.

Imperiali struck his black cane violently on the stones.

"'Undred pounds," he roared in a voice that made the crowd jump, "*and* my last word."

"And welcome!" cried Worthington, before the dealer could tempt him again. He had recovered his coolness and felt ashamed of himself. "Hundred pounds!"—he spat on the stones. "Did you hear him? Why, the horse is worth fifty-five at the outside, with that hock! What is this place, anyhow, Colney Hatch?"

And Knight was knocked down to Imperiali.

The old man turned to Georgina, his suavity restored, and shook a rebuking finger in a pearl-grey glove.

"One 'undred pounds! You 'ave done dis for me, Mademoiselle Georgy. 'Ow shall I punish you?"

"I don't care!" Shining with joy, she surprised him as a different girl. "Oh, Mr. Imperiali, you've saved him. He'll be happy with you, I know."

"Wit' me? No, dat is too good!" He laughed silently to himself for some seconds. "And so you t'ink dat I, *Imperiali*, want a 'orse like dat in my stud? No, you must excuse me; really, it is too good!"

"You bought Knight," said Georgy in a sad voice, "I thought you liked him."

Imperiali's hand came down lightly on her arm.

"I bought him because I like you; you are fond of your 'orse, you suffer wit' him." He beamed on her with a royal and condescending radiance. "See now, when we have settled up de little formalities wit' dis gentleman here, it is your 'orse again, not mine."

"Mine?"

Georgina felt the world spinning.

"You said you wanted work. You will get no job wit'out a 'orse. Wit' one, yes; and you must work and finish 'is training. Get your mod'er to 'elp you; she is a fine teacher."

It was on the tip of Georgy's tongue to cry, "You did this for me because of a passing fancy! Why would you do nothing to

help my mother, whom you love, when she needed you?" But she flushed at the bare thought.

"Mr. Imperiali," she murmured instead, "I — I don't know what to say to you — I never thought any one could be so generous. Oh, and you'll see that I shall make good with him." She paused. "But how can I keep a horse?" she cried in sudden despair, "with no money to pay stabling and no engagement?"

"I will get you an engagement," said Imperiali coolly. He turned round and watched the throng that was dispersing in the falling spring twilight, as the sale drew to its close. Presently he beckoned to a short, grey-haired man with a squab nose and a mongoloid face.

"Mr. Barlowe!" he called.

Barlowe, a travelling owner of good standing, turned at his voice and came up smiling as he recognised him.

"Mr. Barlowe," said Imperiali after greetings, "dis is Mademoiselle Dufay, de only child of dat poor Frederico. Is it not very sad?"

The circus owner looked sympathetic.

"Very sad indeed," he assented, "in fact, it's altogether a dreadful business. I knew your father, Miss Dufay, tented with him for three years. Straight as a die I always found poor Freddy."

"Ah! 'e was your partner!" Imperiali adroitly fastened on the point. "Den 'ere, Mr. Barlowe, is your old friend's daughter who badly needs work. I 'ave given her de 'orse you saw me buy; can you not give her a little place to start, among your utilities?"

"You've given her that horse! No, have you, really? Well, I never did!" Barlowe seemed hugely amused. "I wondered what *you* wanted with him, Mr. Imperiali, and that's a fact. I was tempted to bid myself when I saw you, thinking, you know, there must be some catch. But it's very generous of you, I must say."

"Well now, my friend, I don't ask you to be generous, but just to do yourself a good turn. 'Ere is Mademoiselle — for whom we ought to do somet'ing between us, eh? — who rides well, looks — *comment dire?* — *noble* on a 'orse, for I 'ave seen 'er, and will be useful to you in a 'undred ways. Come, I will wager



you at the end of your tour she is wort' to you twice whatever you will give her."

"My salary list's about as long as I can stand already," objected Barlowe, tugging at his straggling grey moustache.

"Mademoiselle brings her 'orse," Imperiali reminded him. "Your country audiences don't ask de Renz standard; what if she finishes him for de *haute école*?"

Barlowe fixed Georgy with a hard, but straight, eye.

"Is your horse trained for the *haute école*, Miss Dufay?" he demanded.

"Give me six weeks, Mr. Barlowe, and Mother and I will bring him up to standard."

"That's a promise, and on those terms I'll take you. Come to my office in Waterloo Road, opposite the Station, at twelve to-morrow, and we'll talk over terms. Don't expect much from me to start with, I warn you. But if you have any talent, and if you're a worker — not always the same thing, eh, Mr. Imperiali? — then there's the chance of rising. Good night, Miss Dufay, good night, Mr. Imperiali." He raised his hard bowler an inch or two and stumped off.

"D'ere, you see," said Imperiali. "It was not so 'ard as you feared to get a job. Now, until you start and Barlowe looks after him wit' his own 'orses — you must see he agrees to do dat, at any rate — your Knight may stay 'ere and I will pay for 'is keeping. So dat is easy too. Now I must arrange wit' dis man." He turned to the auctioneer's clerk, who was hanging round respectfully, waiting for his cheque. "I will come round to de office in a moment, tell Mr. Bassett," he said, and the man vanished with a bow.

Imperiali held out his hand to Georgy, his eyes tender and lustrous under a lamp in the wall that had just been lit by the ostler.

"Good-bye, work well! You 'ave it in you, I some'ow t'ink. And when you 'ave done your apprenticeship you must come to Paris. In England de circus, it is a child's toy, *hein*? In Paris dey take it *au grand sérieux*. Artists play to artists dere. I do not know, my child, if you 'ave art, but you 'ave, for sure, dat joy of life from which art comes . . . no, not to-day, I know, *pauvre enfant*, but



when you were riding your great Knight in your fad'er's show. Come now, because of dat I shall give you one more present before I go. It is no more dan a name, which I ask you to write in your careless little 'ead to remember if ever you come to Paris. VICTOR DUSSAULT" — he spelt it laboriously out in English letters.

"I shan't forget, Mr. Imperiali," said Georgy, smiling at his whim. "But who is M. Dussault? A circus proprietor? A trainer? A newspaper writer?"

"If you knew," said the old man, teasing affectionately, "it would be useless knowledge to you. You are not advanced enough yet. But remember de name, eh. D — U — S — S —" he broke off abruptly with a look of disgust. "Ah! What does 'ere dis *fière canaille*?"

4

Beneath a lantern in the square entry, now blackening to dusk at the end of the cobbled slope to the street, stood a figure like the caricature of a dissenting clergyman. The lean black gloves, the wide black felt hat, the wisp of white tie, were all clerical; not so, however, the jaunty stride, nor, as the newcomer drew near, the yellow eyes glaring in the harshly lined face. At once the subtle twist of each feature (callously accentuated in the ring by make-up) betrayed the chief of the Rixen-Vaughan troupe.

"Sale over then, Mr. Imperiali?" shouted Joe Rixen familiarly in his shrill voice.

"Yes," replied Imperiali with distant dignity.

"What damned bad luck! I meant to pick up a useful thing or two. Pretty good, though, making a man buy back his own property, for that's how I look at it. That damned swindler and vamooser, Dufay, Mr. Imperiali, has done me out of over two hundred pounds."

"You will please, Mr. Rixen, not use dese languages," said Imperiali. "Miss Dufay 'appens to be wit' us."

"Ow! *Sorry!* Still a fact's a fact, whoever happens to be with us. Where is Miss Dufay, then?"

He stood on tiptoe, peering over Imperiali's shoulder to catch sight of Georgina, who had recoiled into the corner beyond the circle of lamplight as the pantomimist approached. At first he seemed not to find her; then, turning his head with a queer movement to the left, "Oh, there you are," he cackled; "why need you be so retiring, Miss Dufay?"

In past times Georgina had seen little of this man except during his acts, which she had disliked. Sometimes he had brushed past her on the way to the dressing rooms and she had liked him no better; but he had not troubled her. Now, as she felt his eye travel speculatively over her, a throb of nausea assailed her. And at the same time there came back to her mind the only two occasions on which she had before felt just this sensation. One was when a snake charmer's cobra had escaped from its basket and reared hissing against her while she stood waiting for her cue. The other was when in some menagerie she had stood fascinated by a large vulture on its perch, its talons fixed in a red gobbet of meat, its body a dilapidated pile of feathers, from which the fierce head protruded, with back-rimmed yellow eyes fixed in an unblinking stare.

"Where's your father, Miss Dufay?" she heard Rixen ask. "Don't you think he might have had the courtesy to tell me before he disappeared like this? It looks damned fishy, I must say. 'Spect you'll ever see him again? I don't, nor do you, if you spoke your mind. People with just debts unpaid don't come back."

"Mr. Rixen," interrupted Imperiali angrily, "Mademoiselle Dufay does not choose to discuss dese matters wit' you. De sale, you see, is over. Will you please to go?" He pointed with his stick to the entrance.

"And s'pose I choose to stay, old cock? You're not at home here, I fancy, any more than me."

Imperiali took a stride towards him and began to address him in voluble French, mixed with scraps of Italian, in a tone too low for Georgy to make out what he said. Rixen listened at first with a sneer, but grew more and more jerkily disturbed as the diatribe proceeded.

"That's a lie, you beastly wop," he interjected once, "and that's another," he added, "for which I could sue you."

"Now," said Imperiali, as he concluded, pale with rage, "now will you take de door?"

"When it suits me," snarled the pantomimist, though with less assurance. "But both of you understand this before I go. The Dufays have tricked me and robbed me; no doubt they were all of them in it. If I can't find the father, I'll hold it against the daughter — against any of 'em, in fact. They'll learn if I'm the man to be fooled with, and learn it hard. Put that in your pipe and smoke it, you old blackmailer."

He walked to the entrance with his usual jaunty pace; then, turning for a moment in silhouette against a red bar of the sunset sky, gave a leering imitation of an organ-grinder and his flea-bitten monkey.

"*Bandit!*" roared Imperiali at his vanishing back; then he turned to Georgina.

"You look all white and bad again, my child," he cried. "Did 'e frighten you?"

"It's all right now he's gone," said Georgy hurriedly. "He made me turn all queer, I can't think why, just as when I saw a vulture long ago."

"You are sensitive to de animals, *hein?*" enquired Imperiali, drawing her under the lamp and gazing with curiosity at her eyes which seemed for the moment lighter in shade and stared a little.

"But dere is not'ing to see," he told her soothingly. "Do you feel," he added, "de good as well as de bad so strongly? Your 'orses, can you read d'eir character, too?"

Her look grew more normal as she considered his question.

"I can't say. I generally know what they want and what they mean to do next."

"Just like your mod'er," murmured the old man. "*Diol* 'ow well I remember de time when she saved me, I t'ink, from being killed. We were togeder in de stables of my circus at Paris just by de 'ind legs of Vittorio, de great white stallion of mine. 'Stand to de side, Mr. Imperiali!' cries your mod'er suddenly, 'Vittorio is going to kick.' I laughed, but I moved away, and, *ma foi*, de very next minute, Vittorio, frightened by a light passing outside, strikes out wit' his 'oofs just where I 'ad been standing, enough

to break all my ribs, you understand? You are per'aps like 'er, *clairvoyante*, 'oo knows?"

A few minutes later he had despatched his business and taken leave of Georgina, who stood watching his car drive off down the hill with headlights blazing.

And now, upheld by the strong current of joy, despite the lightheadedness of fasting, and despite the shock of Rixen's contact and the varied emotional strains of the past six hours, she had only one thought: Knight was her own, they would never be parted again. No one could warn her off him any more; why she could go and speak to him, surely, this very minute! She ran round to the offices at the back, where the auctioneer, making up his accounts, smilingly admitted her claim.

"Mr. Imperiali's paid up everything," he told her, "and made out the transfer to you. Just sign the acceptance here; my clerk can witness. . . . That's right."

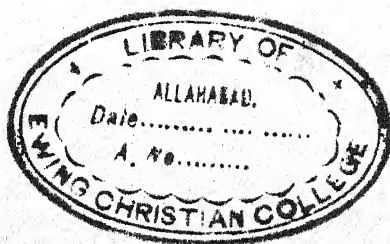
"Can I see Knight now?" asked Georgy trembling, as she laid down the pen.

"Of course you can, Miss. He's yours! Jim!" A groom appeared in the doorway. "Just show Miss Dufay her horse."

The stall, facing west in a corridor leading from the great courtyard, was nearly black, though the last flush of the sunset showed a delicate rose through the circular window, and outlined Knight's dark head. The groom lit a lantern and went tactfully away. Georgy threw her arms about her horse as if she were reunited to a loved brother. He kept trying to turn his head and caress her with his soft lips. At length, her first ardour satisfied, she stood leaning against him, pressing her head into his powerful shoulder. A radiant peace, crowning the endless day of storm and suffering, seemed to her to fill the lamp-lit stable like a holy place. The great horse stood still in the majesty of his high, sloping lines, strength exquisitely proportioned to grace, his head raised as if in proud consciousness of a charge. From time to time he turned it, as though to assure himself that she was still there, and safe.

"Knight," whispered Georgina at last. "You're a protector, aren't you, if ever I need one?" She felt for his muzzle with her hand. "You'd make it hard, wouldn't you, for me to do anything

cowardly or rotten. I'd be ashamed, somehow, when I looked at you." She drew his head down and kissed the snowy star. "Listen," she whispered, blushing a little at her own fancy. "I'm your lady; look after me always, won't you, Knight?"



## CHAPTER THREE

### I

"DE 'EAD up! Shoulders back, Georgina-a-a!" cried Amalia Dufay from the centre of the turf ring on the field by Caversham Bridge where Barlowe's Circus had its pitch at Reading. In the pattern light and shade made by the crevices and loose flaps of the great oblong tent, Georgy, bareheaded, in a green knitted jersey, went round and round the circle on Knight's back beneath the severe eye of her mother.

"Sit up!" murmured Madame Dufay, only half-heard through the pounding of the hoofs in the thick grass; then louder: "Do not jerk on de reins, how off-tenn do I tell you? *Dio mio*, what for do you want to use your great 'ands like a navy? 'Ave I taught you dat? Just a touch, let 'im feel you in de mout' only. So! Dat is better. Now, *attention! Marche Espagnole*. . . . Do not 'urry him, Georgina-a-a! Left foot! Right foot! *Mon dieu, marquez! marquez, donc!* Lean your body to 'elp 'im! Ah! Dat is good. Now de *salut*, nicely dis morning. . . . Don't bend so far back; you are not de poker! Sit easy! Good!"

"That's enough!" said a voice from the side of the tent; and as Knight, with a toss of the mane, flung up from his knees, Barlowe crossed the outer track and walked into the centre of the ring. Mother and daughter waited with a certain tension, as he stood puffing cigarette smoke through his squat nostrils, while his sharp glance took in the points and condition of the horse and then travelled up to survey the erect rider.

"Good!" he said at length. "I'll put you on with it, let me see, week after next at Port Meadow, Oxford. Mind, Miss Georgy!" — he held up a finger — "I don't say you'd get top of the bill at



Olympia, yet. But, as our friend told us" — he grinned — "they don't look for quite the Renz standard in the country. But you've done wonders with the horse," he added, "you and Madame. Why," he crossed over and slapped the satin flank with a practised and affectionate hand, "why, you wouldn't take him for the same beast. 'Pon my word, I thought old Imperiali had gone off his rocker to pay all that money for him at the sale, but to-day, well, I'm not so sure he didn't find a bargain. Yes, get off."

Georgy threw her leg over the pommel and slid to the ground.

"Thanks, Mother, oh, thanks!" she cried, seizing Amalia's hands and kissing her as unconcernedly as if they were alone. "And you too, you darling!" she went on, catching Knight's soft muzzle in both her hands and fondling it with her cheek. "I knew you'd see me through! Oh, Knight, you really *are* an angel!" she cried, while he turned a grave, assenting eye upon her.

She was indeed jubilant. She felt this morning as she used to do on holiday climbing expeditions in North Wales with a school friend who lived there. It was like the moment when, the first bit of rock wall or jutting spur surmounted, the flat country below spread out, conquered. Barlowe had engaged her at a salary of three pounds a week for general utility, agreeing also to stable and feed Knight with his own stud. For a moment she had felt a little anxiety whether this might not be a move to claim possession of her horse; but the fundamental honesty of Barlowe's ugly face had reassured her. Now, after twelve weeks' work under this hard but straight master she knew better than to harbour such suspicions.

But it had been work such as she had never dreamed of in her half-amateur years as manager's daughter. In each of the two daily shows she made three appearances with three changes of dress, riding in the uniform of a French *vivandière* in a mounted quadrille with flags, representing different nations; then appearing on foot in an evening frock to help Barlow with his six intelligent ponies; lastly donning her old cowgirl's dress for a "Buffalo Bill" scene with a stagecoach and "Redskins." Barlowe practised the ponies almost every morning, and she had to attend; this generally meant some groom's work with them afterwards, besides the daily care of Knight which she would not have shifted



to any other shoulders, had she been allowed to. And on top of all this had to be fitted in her private *haute école* practice with her mother and the finishing of Knight's training. The life, which would have been fatiguing enough if they had stopped in one place, was almost insupportable in travel. They rarely stayed a week in one town; sometimes after three days, but usually after one, everything had to be packed for the road early next morning.

Now Georgy came to know short sleep and nights when tiredness itself prevented sleep, long fasts when there was no time for meals, irregular and badly prepared snatches of cheap food. It seemed to her on some days that, with the incessant practising, she was never off her horse's back. She was sore from the saddle, stiff in the thighs, aching in the small of her back from sitting upright, with fingers chafed and cramped from holding the reins. Already she was thinner in face and in body; there were dark lines under the steadfast grey eyes and a more settled pallor in her cheeks from the constant rubbing on and off of make-up. The girlish softness had gone from the corners of her mouth, accentuating the tenacity of the long upper lip. And it was this same tenacity that carried her through. She knew she was conquering the fatigue, not being conquered by it; was slowly gaining the new strength to meet the new demands on her. From the reviving shock of cold water every morning she went out with power enough for the tasks of the day. The menace of inner surrender that beset her when Barlowe scowled at her small professional ignorances, or her mother declared that she would never have "hands", she fought alone in Knight's stall, her fingers twined in his mane; or else by reminding herself that, whatever her faults, she was supporting and must continue to support two lives by her own efforts.

For it was clear to her that her mother would never work again. She walked now leaning on a stick, continuously limping. But it was not this rheumatic disability that counted; Georgy felt that inwardly, morally, her mother was defeated. She had given up her fight. She no longer dyed her hair, put on rouge or troubled to dress. She took to spectacles and shawls and wore her bunched-up greatcoat, whatever the weather. It was her way of telling her daughter that she had retired; she even affected a

dread of riding, as some dangerous accomplishment she had never possessed.

Yet she brought her share to the common life. Secretly, Georgy never knew when or how, she had sold some pieces of jewellery to buy her daughter a few needed clothes. She cooked for the two, if necessary, in their lodgings; kept Georgy's costumes trim; and, best of all, helped her to finish Knight's training in *haute école*, so that she might win a place of her own on the bills. Only when she stood at practice in the middle of the ring did her old erectness, her old authority, her old skill in handling horses return to her. Knight responded to the witchery of Amalia's gaunt, spectacted presence as he never would have done, Georgy knew, to her own zeal and affection. So they had worked together with stubborn persistence and to-day won their first victory. She threw back her head with her old smile as she rewarded Knight with lumps of sugar.

Then suddenly as Barlowe, raising his hard bowler to Madame, moved away towards the entrance, she remembered that she had something more to say to him.

"Mr. Barlowe!" she called, dropping the horse's bridle and running after the manager.

"Well, my dear, what is it?"

"Mr. Barlowe, now that this act is ready, may I start practising something new? I do so want to do some jumping for you."

Amalia, hobbling after her, using the long whip as a walking stick, gave a little scream.

"Pliz! pliz! Do not lis-tenn to 'er, Mr. Barlowe! 'Ow often 'ave I to tell you, Georgy, that jumping in de ring, it is nevaire safe. You 'ave no ground to run between your jumps. Am I not right, Mr. Barlowe?"

"Jumping goes better than anything in England," protested Georgy. "Every night in *Tally-Ho!* when we took the hurdles we got a hand — every night."

"You want to break your leg, do you? Dat will be clevaire. What is to become of your mod'er if you cannot work?"

Barlowe laughed.

"I think you make it out too dangerous, Madame," he told her. "There's plenty of take-off here in our outer track, surely? As

for the risk, if any, why risk is the salt of the circus." He eyed her humorously. "I'll wager Amalia Dufay took some big risks in her day."

"If it was in my engagement, Mr. Barlowe, yes. I was paid to do it. But she is mad; it is not in 'er engagement. You do not want 'er to do it, do you, Mr. Barlowe?"

"I don't know." He twisted his moustache in thought. "Our audiences *do* enjoy leaping, as she says, and I own I like to see enterprise. But what about your horse, Georgy? Is he a jumper?"

Georgy hesitated.

"Knight will try anything I want, Mr. Barlowe," she said after a pause. "He took the five-bar gate in *Tally-Ho!* all right."

"Still, he hasn't the make of a really powerful leaper, to my eyes," said the proprietor, shaking his head. "Too slight behind, by far. Wait a minute, though!" An idea seemed to strike him. "Why didn't I think of it at once? There's that great piebald I bought with the others at the gipsy fair last week. He's a 'lepper' if you like. They took him over fences as big as any at the Horse Show in front of me, and he's a grand circus colour, too. All the same," he looked at the girl, "he's the devil of a puller with an ugly temper as well, if I know anything of horse nature. He's not anything near ring-trained yet."

"Then I'll train him for you, Mr. Barlowe, or let him kill me!" cried Georgy at once.

"Georgy, you 'eadstrong little fool!" exclaimed her mother agitatedly.

The manager seemed annoyed.

"Why discourage the girl, Madame?" he demanded. "What use will she be to me if you put 'nerves' into her? As yet, I don't believe she knows what they mean. You shall try that piebald here to-morrow morning, my dear," he said to Georgy. "If you take to him and he takes to you, for that's what matters most, you shall school him over sticks and we'll put hurdling into your act. Now please don't argue any more, Madame; it's settled. . . . Well, Georgy?"

"I wasn't going to say anything, Mr. Barlowe."

"Not about salary? It's usually the first thing they talk about." He took her arm. "You leave it to me, will you? And you'll find

I'll not be too mean. I can't do impossibilities, as you ought to know by now; but give me time to think it out and we'll see . . . we'll see."

2

Georgy led Knight away to his canvas-rigged stall to unsaddle with a feeling of triumph redoubled. Secretly she always doubted if she had the *finesse* to excel in the niceties of the *haute école*; and since it was too late to train seriously for bareback riding, her only chance of coming to the fore would be in some act with a touch of daring. With this reputedly dangerous horse and high jumping she might make a start—"something that ordinary people can understand", she reflected, as she threw Knight's backcloth across him and made him comfortable.

On her way back from the horse tent, she ran into the fat clown Watts, who might have been mistaken for an elderly, affluent stockbroker in his ordinary clothes.

"Morning, Miss Georgy," he said, a smile breaking over his large, solemn face.

"Good-morning, Freddie. Aren't you through rehearsing yet?"

"Am I through? Can I get started, I ask you?" His cheeks drooped in melancholy folds. "What's a man to do, Georgy, with a partner like this new one of mine? I give him a call for ten-thirty. Twenty minutes after time I go out and find him lying on the grass by the river there, reading. Yes, reading! He's always got that great nose of his stuck in one little book or another. Squiggly little letters: 'Ebrew, I believe!'" His voice sank to reverence, despite his annoyance. "He was educated at Oxford College, so they tell me. Well, I ticked him off proper, and he says, 'Sorry, Freddie old man, but I must just finish this Chorus.' 'Finish it alone then, my lad,' I tells him, 'I don't know the tune.' Upon that he chuckles as if I'd said something damn smart. 'Good old Freddie,' he mumbles, and then chews out something about a pal of his called 'Percy.' So, knowing it's no use when he has one of them fits on, I left him to it. Do you think he's *sane*, this Birlingham, Georgy?"

Georgy gave a little spurt of laughter.

"Poor old Freddie! You'll be missing Cascatelle soon, I'm afraid."

"Im? Oh! Never on your life. He was a nawsty Frenchman, he was. Always getting us a bad name everywhere; you know what I mean," he grimaced and winked. "And rotten on the *entr e*, absolutely rotten. More dead than alive. A fine frost he made for us at the Coburg Palace, eh? Now this Birlingham, he's mad, doubtless, and not a circus man proper, no, not by chalks; still he's got it in him. Say what you like, he makes 'em laugh. You've heard 'em, haven't you? Just so."

As they walked back together into the big tent, Georgy saw in her mind Watts' new partner, his gleaming little hazel eyes and enormous hooked nose. He certainly made audiences rock as he stood in his elegant brown suit watching the fat clown juggling with eggs, until he could no longer refrain from joining in. Eggs cracked, and still more eggs, over his elaborately brushed hair, his carefully pressed suit; but nothing seemed to disturb his unsmiling dignity. He merely replaced his eyeglass and went on juggling.

"I can see you're laughing now at the thought of him," interjected the old clown. "I know it, and that's why I put up with his ways. But these gentlemen amatoors, Georgy, they never know what's fit and proper. He'll be in trouble with the grooms one night over the way he plays Auguste. They expect him to interfere, of course, that's the business. But when he went fishing in the audience the other evening with Madame Elvira's wire, it was going too far. It took 'em nearly five minutes to get it straightened out for her to step off on it."

"But they laughed when he hooked out the false teeth and went round the rows trying to see who he ought to give them back to."

"False teeth are no joking matter, my dear," said the clown, feeling his jaws. "What I say is, be funny, yes; that's what you're paid for. But don't overdo it! This chap Birlingham don't seem to know the difference between work and play. All the time up to some crazy stunt or other. 'Do you think you're a clown for fun?' I asks him. 'I'd be sorry to be a clown for anything else,' he answers. Potty! Quite! Ah, here is his lordship!"

Birlingham, in a rumpled blue serge suit that had long ago

been cut in Conduit Street, was slouching towards them across the corner of the arena, swinging a little leather-bound Greek text in his hand. He took off his hat to Georgy.

"Finished the Prophecies of Kafoozalem?" enquired his partner. "Æschylus, barbarian! The *Persae*!"

"I say, you'll remember there's a lady here, won't you?" said Watts anxiously.

"I'll try, if you'll introduce me, Watts: though, as a matter of fact, Miss Dufay and I have spoken already."

"Oh, certainly, sir!" replied the old clown. "Miss Dufay — my partner, Mr. Balmy Birlingham."

Birlingham shook hands.

"Miss Dufay, do you remember my friend Franklin?"

"Franklin?" Georgy looked vague.

"The sculptor laddie."

"Oh, yes, of course I do. I met him that night . . ." she broke off with a little shiver and gazed round the great tent in discomfort.

Birlingham shot a keen glance at her out of his little eyes.

"Hope I've not had the bad luck to strike a wrong chord, Miss Dufay?"

"Not a bit. Why?"

"Well, the fact is, I've a kind of a message from this Mister Franklin." He plunged his hands into his side pockets.

"Watts, you've been scrounging in my coat again for cigarettes!"

Watts turned crimson.

"You know, Mr. Birlingham, I've been in the Anti-Tobacco League this five and twenty years. Nicotine's a worse poison than alcohol. If I've told you my views once . . ."

"You've played them as accompaniment to every fag I've smoked since I've known you." Birlingham's lean frame jerked with inner laughter; the hazel eyes gleamed. "It's all right. Don't do it again, though. Ah! Here's the letter! Franklin, Miss Dufay, asks to be remembered to you; he'd like to know, are you ever in London, and if so, do you by any chance recall a sort of a half-promise about sitting to him?"

"I'd quite forgotten it," said Georgy dreamily. "It seems years ago —"



"I don't want to shove in the labouring oar, Miss Dufay, but, honestly, Franklin's worth any time you could spare for a sitting. Those coloured statuettes of his are the best thing since Tanagra, I swear. Rampageously vital, and all the crush along Bond Street just now." He gazed at Georgy with unconcealed and blameless admiration. "If I'm not planting the errant hoof once more," he went on apologetically, "I'd just like to say that I believe you could give him the cue for a bally masterpiece. I only wish I could afford to buy it, afterwards."

Georgy ran an amused eye over the lank figure, hunched up at the shoulder and twisting the brim of a golden velours hat in white, sensitive fingers.

"You talk like a sculptor or something yourself, Mr. Birlingham. However did you come into the circus, I wonder?"

"Vocation, simply. I must have been congenitally futile. In the City, believe me, Miss Dufay, at the Bar, nay even, illogically, in the Church, they have the densest obtuseness to humour — of my kind. One practical joke, however mild and tonic, spreads equal blight upon the Bank of England, a respectable solicitor's office, and Cuddesdon Theological College."

"Well," said Watts sententiously, "you've probably wasted your chances in life, young man, and you've come where the work is hardest."

Birlingham flung his hat against Watts' portly chest.

"There you go again, Uncle Fred! Work! Work! Work! Serious responsibility and the rest of it! Can't you take yourself less archepiscopally? Cosmo Cantuar, a distant acquaintance of my graver days, is a song-and-dance comedian compared to you. Not that I more than tentatively fitted on the dog collar, Miss Dufay. I quickly sought the grateful shade of a conveyancer's office in the Temple. At the end of six months I was conveyed by an empurpled employer into Fleet Street and consigned to — well, the gryphon of Temple Bar. But here, at last — this is a circus, isn't it, Uncle Fred, not the League of Nations Assembly? — I find I can express myself and do a little living."

"It don't do to make fun of your work, my boy," said Watts.

"You can't do your work properly unless it's fun to you," retorted Birlingham.



Georgy, who had been knotting some loose twine on the handle of her riding whip, paused suddenly and turned her head to him.

"Do you think I could afford to make a joke of my work, then, Mr. Birlingham?"

"Do both you and your work a damn lot of good, if you could," answered the clown, levelling his hazel beam on her. "Apologies for emphasis, Miss Dufay; but are you aware that since we started on the road you've not given one smile to the wage slaves in the threepenny seats? Your work doesn't express the quintessential you, Miss Dufay."

"Not yet, perhaps, but it's going to!" Georgy fired up.

"Ah! That's how Franklin ought to catch you!" cried Birlingham enthusiastically. "I was playing for that. You *are* alive, then, eh? Well, make them feel alive to watch you! Poor wretches, they need to. Never bring your private worries into the ring; it should be a sacred circle. I know it sounds hard, but our worries aren't our soul, when all's said. 'I want to be happy . . .'" — he hummed a few bars of the familiar song. "You'll never make them happy, Miss Dufay, till you're happy too-o."

"Oh! shut up!" growled Watts, exasperated. "Teach me my slangs after thirty years as a clown, won't you? You'll learn, if they let you live, my lad!"

### 3

In the middle of that night Georgy awoke with a restless mind. On the other side of the small lodging-house room her mother groaned and muttered in fiery dreams; in front a pale starlight outlined the window. Birlingham's mocking hazel eye rose before her in the dark: "You'll never make them happy, Miss Dufay, till you're happy too-o!" And was she not happy then? She might not have the irresponsible gaiety of the strange new clown as he whirled about the arena, ridiculing with fresh impish touches at every show the performers, the animals, the spectators. But that was easy for him who had no ties or cares, no one depending on him; for whom the world outside the ring seemed to be as unreal as that within it; who probably would not worry for the sack itself. . . . Yet that, perhaps, was not quite fair, either. Birling-

ham's chaffing serenity, she was somehow sure, had deeper grounds than that. She turned over and tried to sleep, but found herself still tormented by his hint about the "something-or-other you" — her tired brain, mechanically spinning, would not bring back the long word, but she knew what he meant. She had felt that hidden, struggling self, hemmed in, weighted down daily by a hundred small nuisances, a hundred petty worries. You might try to drag it up to the light, but life revolved too quickly and bore it down again.

This pleading, unsatisfied self — you could not disentangle it alone. If there were some one to help! Some one to hold off the outer pressure of the day, just for a while, and leave you free to bend all efforts inwardly! . . . Abruptly the realization of her loneliness enveloped her. She talked to everybody and knew nobody. In the jostling world of the circus, world of good fellowship and mutual aid, she yet inhabited her own little desert isle. . . . Well, it was no use to worry about that any more than the rest. Friends came, you could not seize on them; so much, if nothing else, she had learnt at school.

The window was greying swiftly with dawn. She really must sleep with the extra difficult day she had before her. Closing her eyes resolutely, she sought to send her mind far away from her own concerns. In the drowsiness that by degrees stole over her, she seemed to be galloping over a grassy plain, with mountain peaks swinging slowly across the horizon. Shreds of imagery from some half-remembered novel or the residuum of a cinema film? She could not have asked herself such questions. But there were no boundaries here; she flew on and on over the plain, a keen wind chanting in her ears. . . .

At about ten the next morning she came out of the dressing place into the big tent, and saw the piebald, which Barlowe had ordered to be saddled for her, standing in the turf track just outside the central ring with two grooms at his head. Several members of the company who had come down for practice or rehearsal were dotted about with interested looks among the empty seats on the edge of the track. Georgy had not brought her mother with her, knowing that she would be no help for this task and that she disapproved all such adventures.

The great horse with his funereal blotches tugged fiercely at the reins and tried to rear as she came towards him over the grass.

"We've had a job to get the saddle on him, Miss," said the elder of the grooms. "He's a devil, he is! Are you sure you want to get up?"

"Of course I'm sure, Harry," answered Georgy with a smile.

The younger groom, a morose fellow, struck in.

"I don't believe he's broken for riding at all. Whoa! Can't yer?"

Georgy carefully studied the horse, watching the continual restless tossing of the head and the rolling back of the eyeball till the white showed blind and deadly-looking.

"Mr. Barlowe saw him ridden," she said at length, "and taken over jumps too."

"Ah! those gipsies!" growled the older groom. "They're up to no end of tricks with horses. How do we know what he was doped with?"

The piebald made a plunging swerve and both men hung hard onto his head.

"We must get him quieter," said Georgy, and brought a carrot out of her blazer pocket. But, instead of accepting it, the piebald bared his teeth, flung his head violently up, and backed away with such force that the younger man, as he swung by the reins, was dragged on to his knees. Both grooms loudly cursed the animal.

"I don't believe he's vicious," said Georgy, with a sudden intuition. "He's frightened, badly frightened. Does he kick in the stable?"

"Not a bit," replied Harry. "He only starts playing the devil when you try to put a saddle on him."

"Afraid to be ridden! I thought so." She put out a hand softly to stroke his muzzle; the same shrinking and tossing followed, the same rolling back of the eye.

Georgy stooped a moment and rose with her old brown riding boots unsprung.

"Scuse me, Miss," interpolated Harry, "if you're going to ride him, you'll want every help you've got to make him behave. He won't answer to your petting, I can tell you."

"He's been hurt enough already," retorted Georgy. "He doesn't need more frightening; he needs confidence. Look here, you'd better both of you stand away now and leave him with me. Don't shout at him, please!" she added angrily to the sulky groom who had just jerked on the reins with a loud oath.

"It's like pulling on an iron rail, his mouth," grumbled the man.

"However hard his mouth is, I can see it's been hurt," answered Georgy. "I should just like to know what kind of bits he's been given. There, stand away."

She tossed off her blazer and stood up facing the horse. Firmly, but without jerking on them, she gathered the reins into her own hands. The grooms, answering to her air of authority, jumped back and stood watching curiously.

As she had expected, the piebald's first move was to back away towards the verge of the arena, trying hard, as he did so, to rise on his hind legs. Although he nearly pulled her arms out, she kept fast hold of the reins, giving him all the head she dared without letting him break free. As he backed, he caught his feet in the red canvas looped on stakes that made the boundary of the racing track, and lashed out with his heels, ripping through the worn stuff and striking a flimsy wooden bench made of a board on boxes. It fell with a clatter that seemed to terrify him. He lunged forward and stood for a few seconds stock-still, with bent haunches, quivering and listening. In those seconds Georgy had her foot in the stirrup and swung off the ground. The great horse sheered away from her as she rose, and for a moment, seeing the grass whirl beneath her, she thought he had spilled her before she could cross his back. Then she felt her legs close on the saddle and was being danced about in the middle of the arena, speaking soothingly to him and taking care not to irritate his troubled mouth. Somewhere behind her she heard a faint clapping among the benches.

After some minutes more of his fretful dancing and fidgeting he seemed to tire; for he slowed to a standstill, pawing and shaking his head. Cautiously she leaned forward and stroked his neck. Instantly his head ducked and his hindquarters lifted in a furious plunge. She heard old Harry shout; but she had been

ready for the trick and threw back her supple body, letting the reins run out. For the next few moments the piebald gave as pretty a show of buck-jumping as could be seen outside a rodeo.

"He'll break her neck or something!" muttered Harry, with thoughts of the Governor's anger, and he ran out into the track, seeking vainly to get round in front of the horse's head.

He need not have worried. Georgy had been on buck-jumpers with a troupe of real cowboys that had toured awhile with her father. As a girl of fourteen she had emerged, bruised and bleeding, from practice with them, able not only to sit bronchos, but to hold her place on the jarring spine of a steer whose horns she twisted. If she lacked now the aid of the cowboy's high saddle, the piebald lacked also the savage, quivering shock of the experienced Western "outlaw." A beam of sunshine, striking through a furled strip in the tent roof, woke the gold sheen in her flying hair and turned her green jersey to emerald, as she rocked aloft, her body swaying to balance the horse's bounds, but her long thighs locked so immovably to his flanks that between knee and saddle she could have held a coin in place.

The contest did not last long. The piebald soon realised that this was a grip from which he could not shake free. Veering sideways in his desperation, he leaped the barrier again and splintered the benches beneath his furious hoofs. Then, blind with terror at the noise of his own havoc, he turned and charged straight for the far side of the arena.

Georgy leant back and pulled ineffectually with all her strength on his iron mouth. It seemed as if nothing now could stop him from striking the opposite benches full-front. But at the last moment there flashed into her mind a trick she had been shown by an ex-cavalryman among her father's grooms. Raising her right hand, she brought the edge of it down hard upon the taut reins. The jerk stopped the runaway dead; but, as she had feared, the pain of it sent him high in the air, tottering dangerously backwards on his bent hind legs. Georgy slipped her feet from the stirrups, and threw her weight forward, grasping the mane with both hands, prepared to slide off him sideways if he went over. It seemed an age that she hung there, while the piebald struggled to retrieve his balance. Then she heard a roar below; felt him

swing back on her; and, pushing away from his shoulder with all her strength, came down unhurt in the long grass by his side, instinctively rolling away from his thrashing hoofs. The grooms rushed forward; but horse and rider seemed to find their feet together. Georgy stood panting, but holding the reins; and tried to soothe the horse as he stood with limbs that quaked from his fall.

"That was a close squeak, Miss!" gasped Harry. "I could have sworn he was atop of you! Let me take him now; surely that'll do?"

"Do?" she answered, her grey eyes aflame. "How can it do, when he thinks he has got rid of me? Don't talk; take his head while I get the saddle straight!"

But, apart from his trembling, the piebald seemed sobered. Georgy examined the girths and bridle; and then, before Harry could protest, swung herself up onto his back again. The old man, with a look of amazement at her foolhardiness, fell back from the horse's head; but, to his surprise, and that of the other onlookers, the piebald, in answer to his rider's voice and leg, began to pace quietly round the track.

"Has she beaten him already, then?" Harry asked himself, scratching the grey bristles on his unshaven chin.

The piebald continued to walk levelly round, answering the rein now and turning without trouble. All that puzzled the old groom was a sidelong motion he made from time to time, flattening back his ears, "as if shy of something", thought the attentive watcher.

In Barlowe's show tent, besides the two thick centre poles that supported the roof, with the ring between them, an array of stout red-painted posts ran round the ellipse of the outer arena, dividing it into a double track. Several times while Georgy had been plunging about on the frightened horse Harry had looked to see them strike one of these poles, but always the piebald had shown wit enough to avoid them. Now it struck the groom that the sidling movement he noticed took place each time the horse drew near to a particular one of the posts. A suspicion darted across the old man's mind and he started forward to give warning. Before he could open his mouth, however, the tremendous voice that



Barlowe had in emergencies peeled startlingly forth from the top of a high back tier.

"Look out, Georgy! He'll wall you!"

The shout was a second too late. With a vicious buck the piebald had lurched into the red pole, seeking to crush his rider against it. Georgy, for the first time taken unawares, flung up her arm to guard her head and reeled in the saddle. The movement helped to save her. The horse, miscalculating by a foot or two, failed to bring its rider's leg and side against the pole and struck it instead with the full force of his powerful shoulder. It cracked with a report like a rifle's; and the piebald, lurching against vacancy where he had expected solid resistance, heeled over the broken stump and went forward floundering. At the same moment, the top half of the broken pole, released from its socket in the canvas above, came hurtling down onto his forehead and felled him.

A heavy double thud sounded on the turf and the onlookers gaped for a moment in silence at the prostrate horse, the prostrate girl, who had been shot from the saddle on to her neck and shoulder. Both lay still. Then in a flash the arena was filled with shouting men running to both victims.

For a few moments Georgy lay on her back on the grass, feeling as though she were being heaved up and down on the billows of an immense green sea. Before her eyes lovely red and gold stars fizzled and crackled; then went out in a dimness through which she heard her mother screaming. She wished that noise would stop, and it did. Then after a while she felt cold water trickling on her forehead and came to her full self again.

Her head thumped, she felt stiff all over; but she tried to sit up. A strong arm helped her and she saw Barlowe's ugly face grinning encouragingly at her.

"No bones gone, I think, Georgy," he said. "I've felt you all over."

Georgy looked about; and, as she turned her stiff neck, hot throbs ran down all over her right shoulder.

"Bad bruises, of course," said the proprietor, as she winced. "I've sent your mother over to my waggon for my special liniment. She turned up at just the wrong moment, you know,



and began to lose her head. So I gave her something to do."

Georgy managed to get upon her knees; then, feeling out for Barlowe's arm, rose unsteadily to her feet.

"What about the horse?" she asked in a husky voice.

"I haven't even looked at him yet," said Barlowe; and in spite of her dazed head she realised what this compliment meant from him.

Still leaning on his arm, she moved over with him to where the grooms stooped round the fallen piebald. Old Harry turned and touched his forehead as they approached.

"He's all right, Governor," he declared; "better than he deserves! A waller!" he spat disgustedly. "He's got no breath yet, and that pole's made a nasty place on his forehead. 'Strewth, I thought it had cracked his ugly skull — better his than yours, Miss, any day!"

Georgy bent down, in spite of a fresh red-hot twinge in her bruised shoulder, and looked at the piebald's head. It lay stretched forward on the grass, the tongue extended, a piteous sight. The tragic black eye that she had never yet seen still looked up at her as though in appeal. The skin on the forehead was badly broken and a raw place appeared. Georgy no longer felt her own pains as she dropped on her knees beside him.

"Haven't you done anything?" she cried. "Where's some water? Harry, bring a bucket and a sponge at once! Can none of you find a bandage?"

The grooms scattered at her command.

The piebald stirred his head uneasily and lay still again, closing his agonised eye. Georgy sat beside him, stroking his white neck on which a single patch of black hair had the shape of a welling tear-drop. Presently the grooms reappeared carrying a pail with a sponge in it, a roll of lint and a big flat tin of antiseptic ointment.

Georgy lifted the sponge from the water.

"Careful how you touch his bad place, Miss!" Harry warned her. "He may have a kick in him yet."

"I don't think so," she answered. "He knows we're trying to do him good, poor dear."

The piebald did not move as she sponged the wound with careful touch. Harry opened the tin of ointment, and more care-

fully still she spread the grey paste over the hurt place. The patient jerked his hind legs, but gave no trouble. Together Georgy and the old groom bandaged his head. Then they stood up and watched.

The piebald, after a minute or two, began to stir and at length got his head up. Georgy put out her hand and he thrust his muzzle into it. She bent over him, fondling his mane and talking to him. Then, slowly, she persuaded him to rise on his forelegs, and at last to get his hind quarters up. He stood, still trembling a little, with forelegs wide apart; then let his head sink before her, seeking her hand again. Harry laid hold of the twisted bridle.

"He's yours now, Miss," he murmured. "It's my belief you'll ride him where you like next time."

"Georgy, sit down now," commanded Barlowe. "You've done all you can and Harry'll see him safe in his stall. My dear, I'd never have let you get up if I'd known he was a waller."

"He's not bad really, Mr. Barlowe," replied Georgy, moving stiffly across to a near bench and sitting down. "He's just terrified, that's all. Some one ill-treated him before he came here, I'm sure of it. But you'll see, he'll do what I want."

"Well, it's time we thought about you now," said Barlowe. "Where's that old woman? Damn her! Can't she find the stuff?" He walked away to seek his waggon.

Georgy sat still by the edge of the ring, her head in her hands. She felt cold and hollow and faintly sick. . . .

"You've had an offul tumble," said a concerned voice in her ears.

She looked up startled and saw a fat man in a light, velvet-faced overcoat and a Homburg hat, leaning on a black stick with a carved elephant's head for handle.

"An offul tumble!" he repeated in the high, childish voice of fat men, his shining eyes, like little saucers of blue china, darkened with anxiety. "It made my heart jump. Pouf! I am all wet still."

He carried a pink hand to the flaxen hair curled carefully across his forehead, and showed her the drops.

"But, I say," he went on, "I hope you are not badly hurt, eh?"

Though used, most of her life, to the free and easy comrade-

ship of the circus, Georgy knew enough by now to repel unsought advances from strange men. But there seemed something so innocent, so genuinely perturbed about this large stranger with the German accent that she felt it would be brutal ill manners to snub him.

"I'm only shaken, thank you," she answered, returning, half against her will, his cordial smile. "And bruised too, I'm afraid," she added, gingerly feeling the base of her neck and shoulder.

"Yes, it would shake you! *Mein Gott*, I should jost think so!" His fatherly concern seemed to grow. "You ought to haf something strong, now, at once, to take away the shock. Glass of good wine!"

He looked round as though expecting to find a waiter with a tray at his elbow and frowned pettishly, twisting his small, waxed moustache, when no one appeared. Then his brow cleared.

"I know," he said, "wait a minute!" He raised his voice. "Sharif!" he shouted.

A crooked, turbaned shadow fell on the sunlit grass outside the open door flap of the tent, and through the opening edged a little spindle-shanked Indian in a blue tunic and puttees, who approached and made a jerky salaam. The big man spoke to him for a minute in German, and he bobbed again and began to sidle towards the door.

"*Aber schnell!*" fluted the other, exasperated at his dawdling, and turned again to Georgy.

"I haf sent Sharif to my waggon," he explained. "I haf some fine cognac there; it is jost what you need." His eyes twinkled at her. "You don't know who I am, do you?"

He seemed to find this a capital joke; and as he beamed at her, Georgy began to feel through her tired limbs a sensation of drowsy comfort like the warmth from a large fireplace. She had at first been almost annoyed at his persistence; now she hoped he would go on talking.

"Do you know what my name is?" he enquired again. "No, I thought you didn't. But you've heard of Riegelmann's Elephants, eh? You must haf!"

"Oh! Are you Mr. Riegelmann? We were told you were joining at Birmingham."

"No. I've come over from Hamburg earlier. We had easy crossing and the elephants are ready for work. So we joined by the road, late last night."

A trumpeting floated through the tent door and Mr. Riegelmann smiled proudly.

"Do you hear? That's Maharanee, the big lady; she's angry about something. I have three, Maharanee, Grete and Katinka; you'll see them to-night. Ah! Here's Sharif at last."

The little Indian was standing behind him, holding a bottle of golden cognac and two slender funnel-shaped liqueur glasses. As he bowed in handing them to his master, Georgy noticed with distaste the sour expression on his unwashed face, with its high cheekbones and drooping, inky moustache. She was glad to see his lean back.

Mr. Riegelmann held up the bottle and surveyed it reverently.

"Eighteen hundred, eighty-four," he cooed, reading the label. "That is the stuff. It will revive you in a minute."

He began to fill a glass.

"Oh, no, thank you, Mr. Riegelmann," interrupted Georgy in a hurry. "I never drink stuff — like that."

Even as she spoke she felt schoolgirlish and awkward before this sophisticated man.

"Oh, but it is medicine!" expostulated the German. "It won't hurt you, upon my word! Just try, please."

He looked so disappointed that Georgy weakened.

"Only half the glass, then," she pleaded.

Riegelmann filled his own to the brim and flung it off, smacking his lips; then he refilled it. Georgy sipped hers and coughed, but felt the fire of it run hearteningly through her chilled frame. As she handed back the glass, refusing any more, Barlowe appeared for a moment in the door of the tent.

"Georgy!" he shouted. "We've found the liniment. Your mother's waiting in the dressing tent."

"I must go, Mr. Riegelmann," said Georgy, rising. "Thank you very much."

Riegelmann stopped her with a puzzled look.

"George?" he asked — he pronounced it "Chorche" — "Is that your name? But it's a man's name, not a girl's — Chorche! Oh!

What a fonny name you haf!" He chuckled heartily and again she found herself sharing his merriment.

"Georgina's my name," she explained. "George was my father's."

"Chorche who?" He seemed as eager as a child in a guessing game.

"George Dufay."

His mouth fell open with amazement.

"You, *you* are Chorche Dufay's daughter? No, it's not possible! But really, are you? And is your mother here with you? Oh! But how nice it will be to meet her again. I knew your father so well. Didn't he perhaps sometimes speak of me? Otto Riegelmann? No? Well, I am sure your mother will remember me."

"I must go to her," said Georgy. "She'll be thinking I'm dead."

"Miss Dufay, Chorche," he twinkled for a moment and then became grave. "Will you tell me one thing? Haf you seen your father lately? No? Well, then, I think I can tell you something about him. Go now, have the liniment put on quickly. But, I say, ask your mother if I can come and see you both one efening after the show. Otto Riegelmann, don't forget. I'm sure I can gif you some news about your father."

As she moved away towards the dressing tent, she could not control an impulse to look back again. He was still standing there, smiling, and waved a hand at her. Again the glow of comfort, of prosperity that he diffused, swept over her. She smiled in her turn with an amused but real happiness.

4

Georgy was astonished at the effects of Barlowe's liniment. The recipe, which he kept jealously secret, he had inherited from his mother, a woman with Caucasian blood, who had in her turn received it from a Persian juggler at Tiflis. After Amalia had rubbed it well into the bruised neck and shoulder, Georgy, who, to Barlowe's satisfaction had refused to go on the sick list even for one show, found herself able to get through her work in the afternoon with no more pain than she could well bear. By the time of the evening performance there seemed no trace of the

strain left, but a little stiffness, and the bruises on her flesh had already grown faint.

That evening Riegelmann's Elephants made their first appearance. Georgy, standing by the entry, ready dressed for the act with the ponies, watched their performance with interest.

"Good efening, Chorche," Riegelmann said, with a twinkle in his china-blue eyes, as he went past her into the ring, his grey, silver-braided tunic showing off his protuberance a little unkindly, and "Are you better after your fall, yes?" he enquired, as he came out amid the applause at the end of his performance. Of his three elephants Maharanee was by far the largest; Grete came next in size, and Katinka, who wore a clown's cap, seemed little more than a baby. The audience laughed as they paced in with their stately, ceremonial tread in a diminishing row, and Riegelmann, cracking his heavy black whip in the centre, beamed and took the laugh to his own credit. The ponderous beasts wheeled and turned; sat up on their mountainous haunches upon huge wooden tubs; and made noisy music, Maharanee banging a drum, while Grete turned the handle of an organ and the baby clown jangled a bracelet of bells on her forefoot. Finally, Maharanee carried the trainer round, puffing, in the coils of her trunk, with the other two following processionally, trunks linked to tails.

But to Georgy's eye, sharpened by her six weeks' intensive circus work, it seemed that there was something wrong with the act. Riegelmann himself appeared to have practically no control over his beasts. He stood preening himself in the middle, cracking his great whip like a pistol and yelling shrilly in German; but the real work was done by the little Indian, running round and round with a peevish look, pulling at the elephants' ears, shoving them behind and crying to them in a fierce voice. "They're frightened of *him!*" thought Georgy, noticing how Maharanee swung away with uplifted trunk and an apprehensive roll of her small eye when Sharif edged past her on the fence of the ring. And presently, as Georgy turned away to see if the ponies were ready, she noticed something leaning against one of the tubs by the entry, and understood. It was a wooden goad of the kind used by *mahouts*; and its iron tip, she saw with anger, was bright and sharpened to needle-point. This led her to look carefully at the elephants



as they rolled out of the arena at the end of their work. Maharanee flapped her great pointed ear in passing, and on the corrugated skin of the neck beneath Georgy perceived dull red scars. She wondered if Riegelmann knew what was going on.

The next evening, by invitation, he paid his suggested visit at their lodgings in a little street running down to the river bank. Amalia remembered him well and was in gracious mood. She had herself gone out to buy a bottle of fine brandy, and this, with three wineglasses of different sizes borrowed from the landlady, stood on the table when he arrived, carrying with him into the bare sitting room an aroma of affluence. Georgy, who had been making coffee on the little gas ring, watched him pull a crocodile-skin cigar case out of his pocket and ask Amalia's permission to smoke with a query of his light, feathery eyebrows. Amalia bowed assent, though she detested tobacco, contenting herself by murmuring, "Georgy, do not!" when her daughter rose from the gas ring to take a cigarette from a packet on the mantelpiece.

"It is offully nice to meet frients like this," said Riegelmann beaming round, while his cigar filled the room with the incense of prosperity.

"Thank you, Madame," he went on, as Amalia filled his glass. He lifted it to her and rolled the brandy round on his tongue.

"Oh! But this is offully nice too; you don't often get such goot brandy in England—they are always drinking their dreadful whisky. Thank you, Madame," he nodded gratefully as she refilled the glass; "and how is Miss Chorche this efening? You know she had a dreadful tumble."

Amalia grimaced.

"She would not listen to 'er mod'er, Mr. Riegelmann. It is 'er own fault entirely."

Riegelmann turned in his chair and smiled gaily at Georgina.

"So you haf your own way, do you, Chorche? I can see you haf the strong will. Oh, no, Madame, it is a good thing, belief me. I haf not enough of it. You keep the strong will, Chorche, and you will be a success."

Amalia clasped her hands and gazed up at the ceiling.

"Do not tell 'er dat, please, Mr. Riegelmann. She is already obstinate as a pig, just like 'er fad'er."



Riegelmann took his cigar from his mouth and looked critically at the ash. Then he leaned forward towards Amalia.

"Madame Dufay," he said, "may I ask you a question? You understand, quite, that I don't want to talk about anything that could distress you, eh?"

"Is it about Father, Mr. Riegelmann?" Georgy crossed over from the fireplace with a look of authority.

"Yes, Chorche." He signalled with his eyes as though he had something important to reveal.

"Then, I think it would only upset Mother . . ."

"No, Georgette, let 'im speak! I am used to it now. Is it dat you 'ave seen 'im, Mr. Riegelmann?"

"If you will allow me, I will tell you all about it. It was, yes, four weeks ago now. I was in a *café* at Berlin after the show at Zirkus Busch, reading a newspaper. Somebody opposite asked, would I gif him a light for his cigarette. I put down the paper and looked at him, because I was sure I had heard that voice before. At first I did not recognize him because he had no moustache. But I knew the eyes, and while I was feeling for my matchbox I said, 'Surely we haf met before?' He said, 'I think not', and quickly turned away his head. Then I saw that little hollow place where he is bald at the back, you know, Madame."

Amalia gave a sudden sob.

"Please, don't be distressed, Madame," pleaded the German. "Is it not goot news that he is alive and well?"

"Go on, please, Mr. Riegelmann," said Georgy.

"I struck a match and said, 'Don't you want to light your cigarette, after all?' He had to turn round then, though he kept his face down, and I told him, 'You are Freddie Dufay, *nicht wahr?*' He looked up with fear in his eyes and said in English, 'Otto, old man, for God's sake, don't gif me away.' I asked him, 'Freddie, what can *you* be doing here like this?' for you see he was fery, fery shabby. He answered, 'You must have heard of my smash.' I said, 'Of course I haf' — it had been all about his failure in our circus paper — 'but what are you doing now?' 'Trying to start fresh,' your father tells me, Chorche. 'I've got a job with Pfalz and Behrmann. We're going East, Vienna, Pesth, Trieste, Ragusa, Sophia, Constantinople. No one will follow me there.' I asked

him, 'Haf you got a goot job, Freddie?' He turns on me — you know his way, Madame — bulldoggish, 'What sort of a job would I get under the name of Zimmermann? A groom, and think myself lucky, by God!' 'But why shouldn't you go under your own name?' I asked him. 'Oh, no,' he answered, 'that won't do now.' Then I enquired of him after his family. 'I left them in England,' was all he says, and sat for a time without a wort, his head on his hand, so. Then he gets up. 'I must be off, Otto,' he says, 'it's early start to-morrow and I'm glad of it. If I hadn't tumbled up against you to-night, no one would haf recognized me. But you wouldn't gif me away, would you, old man?' Now, Madame, you understand, I was horribly troubled to see him in this state, so I asked him, 'Freddie, what in God's name do you mean about gif you away? What is there that I can gif away? Why are you in hiding?' He stood up and looked for a moment as if he would speak, but changed and answered me nothing. 'Surely,' I said, 'you are not afraid of your creditors out here? Were not your affairs properly wound up?' 'I'm not afraid of ordinary creditors,' he answers; and then, 'Otto,' he says, solemn as a *Pfaff* in church, 'nefer gamble. You know where you begin; you don't know where you will end.' 'Who haf you been gambling with?' I asked him, but he had already slipped away outside into the darkness. I rise to follow him; the waiter stops me to pay; and when I get to the doors your husband, Madame, has disappeared. Up and down the street it was empty." Riegelmann turned again to Georgina. "Chorche, why efer did your father go away?"

"Isn't that easy to see?" replied Georgy in a low voice. "He couldn't pay all he owed. He felt his name was disgraced. In his place I couldn't have stayed."

"You would, though, Chorche," retorted Otto shrewdly, "to face up with the music, as you say in England."

"Well, Dad, I suppose, knew what was best for him."

"Best for him, perhaps; but for you and your mother, Chorche, I don't think he did what was best, unless" — he paused and drummed with a fat, ringed hand on the table. "Chorche, do you think your father run away because he was — afraid?"

"Afraid of going about under the load of ruin. I told you," she said wearily.

"No, no, not that money. Was he afraid of anything worse than just his debts?"

Georgy coloured and took an almost menacing stride towards him.

"My father was unfortunate, I know, but he had done nothing to be ashamed of, Mr. Riegelmann. That's once and for all!"

"My gracious gootness, how angry you get! I don't mean to say he would do anything crooked. But sometimes we get in the bad hole, not exactly through our own fault. Was your father a gambler, as he said, Chorche?"

"I nevaire saw 'im touch a card or dice," interposed Amalia emphatically. "'E would not so much as play a game for love with me, though I 'ave always been fond of the cards."

"Then I don't understand it at all," confessed the German. "You see, Madame, I know your husband was terribly scared. You should haf seen his eyes; he had not been sleeping. Can you not think of anything, of any *one*, he was frightened of?"

Georgy suddenly noticed that Amalia was shaking. She twisted her hands together and uttered a little moan.

"Mother, what *is* the matter?" she asked.

Amalia choked a moment, then said in a tremulous tone:

"Georgina, I nevaire told you; what was de use of it? But aftaire what Mr. Riegelmann 'as said, you ought to know. Georgina, you remember dat dreadful night at de Coburg Palace, when you came to our dressing room? 'E had just told me, Mr. Riegelmann, dat I was rueened, dat we were all rueened. It med me mad, you know, and I ask 'im 'ow 'e dared to treat 'is wife and child so. 'E flew in a rage and sent Georgina 'ere away."

"Yes, I went downstairs to old Jenny for comfort."

"Well, aftaire you 'ad gone, I cried, and 'e talked to me and 'e got calmer. 'E was nearly crying too, and 'e came and put 'is arms again round me and said 'e would make a new start and t'ings should be all right for us all. 'E had friends, dey would help 'im. Well, I 'ad just finished dressing when dere comes a knock at de door, angry, so." Amalia rapped on the table with a sound that made both her listeners jump. "In walks dat Rixen wit' a frightful face."

"I knew he was coming up to you," put in Georgina, "I heard him threaten Dad in the passage outside our room."

"'E said to your fad'er, 'I want to speak to you alone, at once.' Now you must know, Mr. Riegelmann, dat I nevaire interfered in de business, nevaire. It is not de wife's part. So I just said, 'I shall wait for you at home, Freddie,' and went out. 'E did not come home for two hours, Mr. Riegelmann, two mortal hours, and when 'e came, oh! I could see it was all over. 'E had nevaire hope again. 'E nevaire tried to put 'is business right, really; believe me, 'e did not. And I knew from dat hour dat 'e would leave me. I prayed to 'im on my knees to tell me what it was dat so lay on 'is mind, crushing 'im down. 'E would nevaire speak a word."

"Mother, you never told me any of this." Georgy sat down on a chair beside her with a white face. "His letter to me said nothing of this kind, nothing at all. I believed . . . I believed it was his debts, and," she looked away, flushing, as she added in a murmur, "and Mr. Imperiali. You remember what he said, Mother?"

"Oh! jealous always, like a dog wit' a bone," said Amalia coolly, without lowering her voice. "'E 'ad no cause, I assure you, Mr. Riegelmann. But no, it was not Mr. Imperiali dis time. It was dat Rixen. 'Ow I 'ave always 'ated 'im!"

"You mean Joe Rixen?" enquired Riegelmann anxiously. "*Ein furchtbar Kerl!* I am sorry, Madame, if he has anything against your husband. He is without pity; indeed, I am sure he is not all right here!" He tapped his forehead with a polished nail. "Who was he? Where did he come from? Nobody knows. Is Seth Rixen his cousin truly? Nobody beliefs it. I haf been told he was picked up from the gutter in one of your English cities. A *Schuhmacher* — cobbler, as you say — takes him as errant boy. Efery Saturday night that *Schuhmacher* get drunk as a lort, put the boy up in a corner and throw at him with his tools. One time he cuts his head wide open; the police come to enquire. They find blood on the floor, but the boy flown. He has run away to join the circus. Old Trueman the acrobat takes him, they say, for a Risley kid; throws him up and down on his feet. But Trueman he is worse sober than the *Schuhmacher* drunk. Joe is off again; now he is assistant to Pirelli the plate-spinner. He carries on the plates. One night he drops one, and he looks so fonny, so thin and starved and fright-

ened, that the people laugh. 'Drop some more, my boy,' says Pirelli — and so he becomes a sort of clown, Auguste, you understand. Then one night he breaks fifty and smashes the last on Pirelli's head. The people laugh more than efer, but Pirelli, he laughs no more. He tells Joe to go and be Auguste with some one else. That is how he started before he met the original Vaughan Brothers, David and Alf. But he has been also, I belief, school-rider, trapeze artiste, dog-trainer. David Vaughan is dead years ago, and — haf you heard? — old Alf is in the madhouse now."

"What a shame!" cried Georgy.

"Ah! But do you know who did it? Joe! He was always striking him, striking him in their act, on the head, on the spine. The audience laugh; but Alf he is too old, he could not stand it. Now he is shut up and Joe has no partner to share the profits. I tell you if I thought that man had a quarrel against me, I would run away, far, far, on my honour, yes . . . Well, I don't know, it is all fery sad."

"We might write to Father, care of Pfalz and Behrmann," suggested Georgy.

"I don't think you would get an answer," said Riegelmann, shaking his head.

Georgy felt that he was right. Her father, who had disappeared so skilfully, would be equal to eluding any search they might make for him now.

"It might be safer for him, you see," went on Riegelmann, "to let him lie fery low for a time, as he seems to wish. You don't want to give Joe Rixen a clue, as you easily might if you were to be imprudent."

He looked round and saw that Amalia was weeping.

"Try to look on the bright side, Madame," he urged her. "You know you haf a fery good daughter. Yes, Chorche," he nodded at her, his whole face smiling, "I know you work enough for two, now your mother is not so strong any more. And you are getting on fast. Every one in the circus tells me the same. Barlowe beliefs in you, yes, upon my honour."

He noticed the spark that came into the girl's eyes at these words and chuckled with responsive happiness.

Amalia sat up determinedly and put her handkerchief away.

"You are neglecting Mr. Riegelmann, Georgina," she said. "Fill 'is glass quickly."

"No, thanks," said Riegelmann. "Well, if you insist, jost one more only."

He sipped the cognac; then dived into a pocket and brought out a pack of cards.

"You will play a little game, eh, Madame? You told us you liked the carts. Oh! No gambling! Poor Freddie, he was right about that. Jost for the fon only." He flipped a copper or two onto the table and began to shuffle the pack. "Won't you play, Chorche? What? You don't know the game? Oh, then I shall teach you. It is great fon. You will enjoy it offully."

Georgy could not refuse, and soon found herself joining in his merriment. It was impossible to be staid with him; he was so jubilant over every point he scored; so tearfully despairing at every check. Soon Georgy's clear laughter filled the room, and even Amalia, who was winning nearly every trick, relaxed into her grim, infrequent smile.

But at the same time Georgy noticed how regularly Riegelmann, now waiting for no invitation, filled and emptied his glass. His chubby face grew pinker and pinker; a moist film began to dim the china-like sheen of his eyes; his laughter grew more and more treble. At length she judged it prudent to offer him a cup of strong coffee. He drank it vaguely and cheerfully, and a few minutes later, a little calmer, he pressed open his slim gold watch and said he was keeping them up too late. Amalia tactlessly pressed him to a parting glass of brandy; he made it two before Georgy lit him downstairs, laughing rather sillily, and opened the front door for him.

"Goot-night, Chorche," he bubbled, his eyes gleaming in the rays of her candle. "Do you know I haf had an offully jolly efening? Yes, really, offully jolly. One night you will come to dinner with me, eh? You and your mother both, at the hotel. Good-night, Chorche, *auf wiedersehen!*"

"Not that way!" Georgy called after him. "You'll be in the river, Mr. Riegelmann."



He turned about and tacked erratically up the street, a burly shadow in his long overcoat.

Georgy went thoughtfully back upstairs and lit a fresh cigarette.

"Georgy, do not," said her mother from her seat before the little fire she had lighted against the damp chill of the riverside. "You know 'ow I 'ate to see girls smoking."

Georgy disregarded her.

"Mother," she asked, "when did Dad first meet Rixen?"

"Dat I can tell you, for I remembaire well. It was four — no, five — years ago when I was laid up wit' my rheumatics so badly and you were wit' de good Sisters. I stayed in London, while your fad'er took de 'orses to Paris to de Cirque d'Or. 'E was engaged dere from January, oh! up to end of March. 'E mat dat Rixen at de Cirque d'Or, and den when 'e came back 'e would engage 'im for 'is big summer season at Blackpool. Aftaire dat dey were very t'ick, and it seemed 'e must engage Rixen at ev-airy season 'e gave. I nevaire could stand it; I beg always dat 'e would send de man away. But 'e would answer ev-airy time, 'Oh! no, I must 'ave Joe,' and you know, of course, dat Rixen is clevaire, 'e goes well, though I could nevaire see why dey laugh at 'im, for I could cry rather dan laugh. But what could I say to your fad'er to stop 'im? Always, you remembaire, we 'ave the Rixen-Vaughans."

"I didn't see much of them," mused Georgina.

"I would not let you," Amalia wriggled her shoulders. "Dat Joe, 'e always made me de flesh to creep."

"Can father have owed him money? Privately, I mean, for some gambling debt that never came up at the public meeting with the other creditors? I know he was mad at Dad's disappearance. I told you how he threatened me at the Hare and Hounds."

A sudden quaver in her voice made her mother look up sharply at her.

"Are you ill, Georgette, are you cold? You are shivering all over."

"It's nothing," said Georgy, gripping the mantelpiece. A red cinder had turned suddenly, as she gazed, into a gobbet of raw flesh, and through the black bars of the grate she saw the unblinking yellow eyes of the vulture regarding her.



The next morning, the last day of the circus in Caversham, as Georgy swung off the piebald's back at the end of jumping practice, Barlowe came towards her across the arena.

"Got him eating out of your hand, then, Georgy?"

"We've had very little trouble with him since that morning," she answered.

"What about posts?" asked Barlowe.

"He's afraid, almost, to pass them, poor dear. But he's not afraid of me on his back any longer. And he *can* jump, Mr. Barlowe; some day he'll astonish you." She turned the horse's head to show it to the proprietor. "Haven't his cuts healed well?"

The piebald still had plaster strapped to his forehead, but the wound was as good as healed.

Barlowe patted his neck.

"What are we going to call him?" he said.

"Hadn't he a name when you bought him?" enquired Georgy.

"None that I was told."

"That's strange, seeing that he's been a ring horse."

"A ring horse? Nonsense, my girl! The gipsies had hardly broken him for ordinary riding. He never smelt sawdust before this."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Barlowe," replied Georgy, colouring, "but I'm sure I'm right. Now he's at home with me, he goes round of his own accord without any guiding."

"Get up and show me!" said Barlowe curtly.

Georgy obeyed and trotted round two or three times with an easy rein.

"By God, it's true!" exclaimed the proprietor. "Well, fancy me waiting for you to show me that! All right, get off! There's no end," he went on ruminating, "to the tricks of these gipsies with horses. This one has a history, Georgy, maybe a very queer one. Neither of us is likely ever to know it."

They both stood gazing at the piebald as if expecting him to be delivered of his secret. The horse stood still beneath their scrutiny, only turning his melancholy head from time to time, with a little clink of his bit, towards Georgy.

"We shall never know it," repeated Barlowe. "Still, that's not the point. You think you can really make something of him?"

"Think, Mr. Barlowe? I know. You should have seen him over the big hurdles in the field yesterday. He's used to them; he's got a grand action. Mayn't I" — she faltered — "mayn't I put him into my act too, at Oxford?"

"It was about your act I wanted to speak to you. Come to my waggon, will you, and bring Madame."

Georgy went to the dressing tent in search of her mother, and threw a greatcoat over her jersey and breeches. Then, together, they went to the caravan of plain black wood with lace window curtains in which Barlowe (a single man) lodged on tour and did his business.

"I've been thinking," he began, "about your *haute école* act, Georgy, and I'm strongly of opinion that we'd better not start it at Oxford after all."

Georgy looked stunned.

"But, Mr. Barlowe," she stammered, "you promised I should open . . ."

He stopped her with a heavy hand on her arm.

"Don't you get flustered, my girl," he said gruffly. "When did you hear of me breaking my word? Never, I think. Just wait now till you hear what I have in mind."

He ducked for a moment behind his roll-top desk, and then spread out a large coloured poster before them.

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"Do you know the Ridley Hall at Birmingham?" asked Barlowe. "Well, it's nearly as big as the London Olympia. I've booked it for the whole week of the Fair; the city'll be crowded and I've risked a bit of a splash with the printing. My advance agent says the bills have done wonders and the early booking has fairly surprised me. Moreover," he slapped a pile of letters on the desk, "I've an answer here from the Lord Mayor, accepting my invitation to a box for himself and his family at the Gala Opening. It'll be, in short, one of the biggest things I've done; it was for this I got Riegelmann and his Elephants over from Hamburg at an expense I daren't think of. Now, Madame, with your experience, you know what's what. Isn't it better for Miss Georgy here to make her *debut* on a night like that, than to sneak into the ring, so to speak, at Oxford when the students are away and there'll only be bumpkins to watch her?"

"Rather!" Georgy broke in enthusiastically, her cheeks warm and her eyes shining.

"Now perhaps you understand me. And if you can satisfy me that the piebald's reliable, you can make it a double act, *haute école* followed by leaping."

"Splendid! Oh, splendid!" Georgy sprang to her feet, exulting.

"What a child it is!" said the battered old wanderer indulgently. "Now sit down, my girl, and try, if you can, to be business-like. About terms ——" his voice hardened, "I'll raise your salary to seven pounds a week for a twelve-weeks' engagement, continuing to pay the keep of your horse and to provide your costumes — don't you forget that I'm doing that as well. It may seem to you not a great deal, but it's sure money and you're quite unknown. I'm taking all the risks and I'm doing the advertising for you. Further, I shall allow for what you're doing, and what I expect you to go on doing, in turning that piebald into a first-class ring horse for me. If at the end of your engagement I decide to keep him, I'll pay you a percentage on his value, for your work; if I don't, you can buy him from me and I'll knock that percentage off the price."

"Oh, Mr. Barlowe," broke in Amalia ruefully, "my daughter will not be able to t'ink of buying a horse wit' what she is earning."

"How do you know," asked Barlowe, "that this is all she will

be earning by the end of her time with me — if she makes good? No, that's not a promise, Georgy; it all depends on how you pan out. Meanwhile, that's my offer. Is it take it — or leave it?"

Georgy did not hesitate. The offer was like the man, neither generous nor mean; but she felt that it would be a safe job, if she pleased him, and she had caught on to his hint that there might be better to come if she proved herself a success.

"Of course I agree, Mr. Barlowe," she said, "and thank you ever so much."

"Good; I'll draw the contract out in form." He leant over and gripped her hand. "This is your real beginning, young lady; good luck to you! You're making good money now; see that you earn it!"

6

The next morning they were up at early dawn for the move to a one-day stand at Wallingford, on the road to Oxford. It was a morning of warm rain that dripped from the poles on the wag-gons, and loaded the grass blades down with flashing beads. Across the river the red roofs and square grey church tower loomed dully through the leaves; to the west, where a line of tall trees marked the edge of the meadow, mist curtains swayed from the trunks to blot out the hills. The wet, however, did not depress Georgy as she moved about, whistling, in her blue waterproof and yellow rubber Wellingtons, her damp curls escaping in wisps from the rim of her beret. The vague discontent that the new clown's piercing criticism had stirred in her at the beginning of this week had disappeared in the thrill of her battle with the piebald and in the sense of mastery that had followed her conquest of him. She had gained her place in the circus now; was to be no longer one of a group, but an artiste with her own name on the bills. After such fatigues, so many doubts, satisfaction had come. Small, but distinct, she saw herself glittering at the end of a long vista as a star. There was a goal upon which she might bend all her being. Dimly discerned when she first joined the circus, it had, with Barlowe's stimulating handshake, leapt to clear and pressing shape in her imagination. From a wistful hope it had turned to an am-

bition that could drain into its own channel all other passions and potentialities of passion, a dream that could supply the place of religion or ideal, wraiths that had never impressed her in the course of her divided and distracted upbringing. She knew now what she wanted, and so she went about serenely, ducking under the guy ropes of tents not yet struck, and singing to herself by snatches as she tossed her head to shake the raindrops from her hair and lashes. She must find the travelling waggon assigned to her mother; get her snugly installed; and then return to Knight and the still unnamed piebald, whom she had already seen blanketed and made as comfortable as possible for the rainy journey. They were to follow in the string with the grooms, but she meant to take her full share of walking and riding with them.

"Miss Dufay!" said the voice of a man hurrying past, "there's a bright lad over yonder asking to speak to you."

It was Birlingham, the clown, a smart suitcase in one hand, and an untidy bundle from which an artificial foot with huge pink toes stuck out, in the other. He jerked his head towards a small cart standing on its shafts by a clump of pale-leaved willows that drooped on the verge of the encampment, and dashed on his way. Georgy, surprised, walked with her swinging stride over a bridge of rotting wood spanning a ditch to the place he had pointed out. "A lad to see me?" she wondered, "it's some mistake, surely. No! Here he is anyway."

She had peered round the corner of the cart and saw a dark gipsy boy of about twelve lurking behind it. His head and shoulders were protected by a sack, beneath which showed a green velveteen waistcoat, stained corduroy breeches and frayed brown leggings.

"You asked for me?" she enquired with a little bewilderment in her tone.

The boy nodded, opened his mouth to speak, and then stopped, gaping at the tall apparition, all blue and pale gold in a watery smile of sunshine that had for a moment parted the ragged edge of the eastern rainclouds. Georgy was captivated by the brown eyes that admired her naively out of his chubby, brick-red face. She smiled at him.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Pedro," he answered, husky with nervousness.

"And it was really me you wanted?"

He mustered his bravery and the words slipped out in a breathless half-whisper.

"Please, are you the lady that was thrown by Patrico?"

"Patrico?"

"My piebald horse, Miss."

"So that's his name — Patrico!"

"It's the name we give him, anyway, Miss. Please, was it you he threw?"

"We came to grief together, Pedro. It wasn't my fault he was hurt."

"No, Miss, but he's not bad really, Patrico."

"I know that."

"Don't have him destroyed then, Miss, will you?"

"Destroyed?" she cried startled. "Whatever put that into your head?"

Pedro thrust a finger under the rain-sodden sack and ran it in despairing worry through his black curls.

"Go on, Pedro," said Georgy. "There's nothing to be frightened of. I don't look as if I should bite you, do I?"

He smiled with a shy blush.

"No, Miss, you *don't*." Again he gathered courage. "Please, Patrico's not a killer."

"Who says he's a killer?" demanded Georgy sharply.

The boy looked with sullen eyes at the ground.

"Pedro!" said Georgy, "look up, look at me! That's better. Now, you tell me the truth. Has Patrico ever killed any one?"

"I don't know," mumbled Pedro. "I never said he had, did I?" He broke out desperately. "It's not fair to the horse, the way they talk. I rode him more'n a year and so I ought to know, didn't I? He's as good as gold, never gave me no trouble once. So please, Miss, you won't have Patrico destroyed, will you?"

Georgy brought out her handkerchief, in which she kept her loose change twisted.

"Pedro," she said, untying the knot, "here's a shilling for you. You were brave to come here and tell me about Patrico. I promise you he's in no danger from me or any of us at present. But Pedro,"



she eyed him closely as he turned the silver coin over in his fingers with a look of incredulous ecstasy, "you ought to tell me more than you have."

He shook an obstinate head.

"Well, surely there can be no harm in telling me this? Where was Patrico in a circus before?"

"I don't know where, Miss, honest I don't know that," protested Pedro.

"But you know he *has* been in a circus before, somewhere?"

"He was brought long ago by a man from a circus," owned the boy reluctantly.

"What man?" cried Georgy, bending forward with eagerness.

"I don't know his name." Pedro shrank back among the branches of the willows. "I was small then, and Grandfather Nebo wouldn't tell *me* his name, now would he, Miss?"

Georgy took a step forward and put her hands on the boy's wriggling shoulders.

"Pedro," she said in a low tone, "what I want to know is, who treated your horse so cruelly?"

"How can I tell?" he almost screamed, trying to break away from her hold. "Honest to God, Miss, I ought not to be here talking to you like this. If Grandfather Nebo heard, he'd skin me!"

"Grandfather Nebo can't hear us, Pedro. Now, some one has savaged Patrico, hasn't he?"

"Cruel!" said Pedro with a sob. "I'd heave a rock at him!"

"Well, who was he?"

Pedro glanced down at his talismanic coin and seemed to gain resolution from it.

"Look here, Miss, I like you. You're fine, begging your pardon, and — and — I know you'll be good to Patrico. But I dursn't tell stories. Only you take the tip from me. Look out for the man with the false eye. Don't you get across him, Miss, on your life. He's ready to savage more than horses, I can tell you. Now I'm off, else Grandfather Nebo'll be missing me. I got to get back to Goring before breakfast time."

"Stop, Pedro," she called, "there are too many men with false eyes about. Which one was it?"



But it was too late. The boy had crashed into the heart of the willows. She could not spare time to hunt him through the hard twigs. Already the circus ground was almost clear and she had not yet even found her mother's waggon. She ran back fleetly, murmuring to herself as she went.

"He'd savage more than horses, would he? Well, he'd better not touch Patrico while I'm about or he'll be savaged himself!"

## CHAPTER FOUR

### I

"You look peeved, Miss Dufay."

It was Birlingham who spoke at rehearsal, in shirt sleeves of pink tussore with gold links, a bulbous pasteboard nose covering his own remarkable organ. He came to the edge of the arena, staked out on the turf of Port Meadow, Oxford, and stood looking at Georgy, who sat swinging her foot and cutting grass blades with her switch.

She could not help smiling at his appearance.

"I'm furious, Mr. Birlingham," she confessed.

"Frank has less of the corridor draught in it," he hazarded.

Her smile deepened.

"If it's to be Frank, it will have to be . . ."

"Georgy, with fraternal respects, thank you."

He plucked off his nose in a sweeping bow, and replaced it in the middle of his forehead, where it gave him the look of a dissipated rhinoceros.

"What's up?" he asked, without further affectation.

"Clothes, every woman's trouble," replied Georgy.

"Funny! I'd have said you were the last gal on earth to worry over fluff."

"Fluff!" cried Georgy. "Fluff's just what I'm trying to get out of! Frank, you know I'm opening, on my own, when we get to Birlingham, the week after next?"

"I do," he grinned in honest pleasure. "I've sent a five-line whip to certain acquaintances I have among the medico-boys in that historic brick kiln, bidding them bring their hordes."

"I say, that was nice of you. But, Frank," she rapped her whip

against the bench in front of her, "I will *not* appear on Knight for *haute école* looking like a *révue* star!"

"Come again," said Birlingham, blinking. "I don't get you."

"Mr. Barlowe's told me to go to the wardrobe mistress to be measured for a dress" — she pulled a scrap of paper out of her glove — "'white and silver,' she read, "'long divided skirt, white plumed headdress, silver slippers.'"

"Oh! But that's not your style at all," said Birlingham; "you want decent riding kit."

"Oh! I'm glad you see that, Frank; none of the others can. To ride in spangles and dancing shoes, it's all wrong. I can't tell you why, but I feel it. There's nothing sham about either of my horses, is there? We're not going to give a mannequin parade, but do real work. For that I want to look businesslike. Who ever saw a Fairy Queen at a meet? That's what every sportsman in the audience will say and you know how many that means in England."

"Have you put it to the boss?"

"He growled — you know how short he is — and said I could wear a habit if I got it for myself."

"And can't you?"

"No — quite hopeless. I simply can't afford it. Oh, but that satin and those feathers! I shall look a joke."

"Wait a minute."

He sat down on the bench beside her, removing his false nose and scrutinising her with an intentness that puzzled her.

"What *is* the matter, Frank? What are you staring at?"

"Look here, my dear," he said, standing up again, "I've a hunch I can pull you out of this little hole, if you'll take a suggestion from me." A clatter of hammers fastening benches drowned his voice and he looked round in irritation. "I can't explain my idea here," he said. "Georgy, you know the old man isn't opening till to-night, don't you? The elephants and half his hands got hung up on the road outside Abingdon, helping shift that broken wagon that jammed the bridge. Well: Uncle Fred and I have duly ronuked up our new quips, and your great devil of a piebald sailed over those sticks behind the horse tent like a lamb this morning, for I saw you at it . . ."

"Yes," murmured Georgy, "I'm going to surprise people with Patrico."

"Well, then, you've nothing to keep you. What say to a quiet afternoon in a punt up yonder stream?"

"Oh! I mustn't take to idling, Frank!"

"Clean kill yourself soon, lass, with conscientiousness. Honestly now, what do you want to fuss round here till five for?"

"Nothing, really, I suppose."

"Come along then. Sun's shining, and it's your one and only chance to hear my idea for burying your Fairy Queen."

"But why can't you tell it now?"

"Because there's a story to it, Georgy."

"A story? Now I'll have to come. Frank, you are a first-class codder, you know!"

"I happen, for about the first time since you've known me, to be rather serious. But are you coming? Yes? Meet at the lower gate down by the path there at two; will that be all right? So long then."

Georgy moved away to change, and Birlingham walked out of the big tent, to stand for a moment by the doorway, gazing across the flat riverside meadow at Oxford.

In the foreground, across a railway arch and the roofs of a mean modern suburb, the dusky brick campanile of St. Barnabas rose with the thrust of a factory chimney; behind it, incredibly remote in the gold-dusted summer haze, the fragile grey pinnacles and the leaden dome of the old city hung on a sky like faint blue muslin. The clown lit a cigarette and dreamed till he was interrupted by a jog at his elbow. He turned and saw his partner, Watts.

"At which of 'em," asked the old man with awe, "at which of 'em was you educated, Frank?"

Birlingham laughed and twisted him round by the shoulders to face the white roofs of Barlowe's insubstantial city on the flats behind him.

"That's my University, Uncle Fred," he replied. "And yet, don't let me be ungrateful. I'd never have learnt to appreciate as I do your Live Life Faculty of Arts without my three years at Magdalen."

"Maudlin?" grunted the aged clown. "Ho, yus! I bet you were, the lot of you."

2

The stir and shouting of the circus encampment died away as Birlingham drove the punt with long, easy strokes up river towards Godstow. Looking back, Georgy watched the tents dwindle to a low-lying snowdrift on the immense green meadow. Beyond the line of small willows marking its verge, the spires, still guarded by the Italianate tower of the slum cathedral on the canal bank, stood up higher each moment as the boat receded, their mouldings plain between the July trees in the more settled light of the afternoon. A deep sky, with small shining clouds assail in its depths, arched over them. On the left bank a rim of minute red villas fringed the edge of the flat; on the opposite side tall poplars rustled solemnly together and the Cumnor Hills rose in lush greenery and wild solitude. They passed a discoloured barge or two moored in the shallow basin, and a four-oar outrigger, manned by excited small boys, fled downstream until its shouting and splashing grew faint. The silence deepened, broken only by the skimming of small waterfowl across the lilies and the shambling tread of old cart horses tearing the meadow grass. Then, beyond the lock, the Gothic wall of the ruined Priory showed, while a hushed roar of weir water came from a hidden creek.

Birlingham tied the punt to a willow root and sat down, offering Georgy his cigarette case. She was dipping her hand in the current and watching the silver drops fall flashing back again into the stream.

"Do you like this sort of corner," he asked her, "or do you need to be always in the swim to feel happy?"

She locked her hands behind her bare head, and the sun struck her upturned face as she studied the thin willow leaves.

"I don't remember," she answered, sending lazy smoke through her nostrils, "ever having had quiet times. And I'd wilt, I'm sure, if I hadn't work to do."

"I suppose I'm more or less like you. The country's all right

for a day off or a holiday, but I must have crowds to keep up my vital statistics."

She looked at him whimsically.

"I wish I knew, Frank, why you ever joined the circus. All *that*," she waved to the tips of the spires, above the reed-beds, "all *that* seems to me much more your place."

Birlingham's hazel eye twinkled behind his enormous nose, as he murmured a snatch of verse through his blue whorls of smoke:

"'And roamed the world with that wild brotherhood,  
And came, as most men deemed, to little good,  
But came to Oxford and his friends no more.'

I've always felt those lines fitted me. "The Scholar Gipsy" — more gipsy than scholar in the case of F. B., I'm afraid. And yet I got the impulse to rove here in Oxford and from a philosopher's tome."

"How?"

"My last night up. I was sitting in the window seat of my digs in the High, looking down on the lonesome black street, while Big Tom crashed out twelve and the end of my academic career. As I counted the strokes I was reckoning up my achievements: no big bag, you may take it from me. Ploughed in Schools — I never read anything but old Æschylus and Aristophanes, and them, always, with my own views on the Greek tongue — twelfth man in the College Cricket Eleven, celebrated interrupter at Union debates, understudy Fourth Citizen in the O.U.D.S. *Julius Caesar*. It didn't seem to me an impressive bag; so, to drive away the hump, I began to shovel books into a packing case. One of 'em slipped out of my hand and fell open; and as one always does when one ought to be getting on with something else, I began to read the page. It appeared to be by a merchant named William James, a psychologist, I believe. I can't quote his words, but the gist of 'em was this: that every one might find, if he looked hard enough, some way of life that satisfied his real self, that left him, so to speak, with no loose ends hanging over, no bits of gravel to hold up his machine. I sat down to think this over. My real self, what was it? Sheer irresponsibility! Ragging had been my one serious industry; in fact. I'd come within a piercing squeak of being sent

down three times, twice by the College and once by the Proctors. My real self, I saw at once, was a clown. 'Be one, then!' said a voice inside. 'It's madness!' I answered. 'What would the family think?' 'Better be real,' says the voice, 'at any price.' 'But a *clown*,' I argued with the mysterious stranger, 'it's a bit of a drop, isn't it, for the son of a Canon?' 'Better a good clown than a bad bishop,' the voice slaps back; and at that I felt beat, and, says I to myself, 'I shall do it.'"

"And you ran off to a circus?"

"Not immediately; most of us look twice at our fences. There was the Theological College and the conveyancer's office — you remember — to come yet. But I escaped in the end."

"And what *did* the family think?"

"We draw the curtains and retire on tiptoe from the sick-room. I only found one friend to back me, my sister, Ruth, which was odd, for she was as grave a girl . . ." he was going to add, "as you, Georgy," but turned it into "as anybody. She didn't say much," he added, "but she seemed to understand."

"And does she come to see the show sometimes?" asked Georgy. Birlingham quietly dropped his ash overboard.

"She's dead," he replied.

"Oh! Frank, forgive me . . ."

"It's quite all right, my dear; we came here to talk of her. She was killed by the influenza last year. You know, I'd always thought that if anything happened to her it would be breaking her neck with the Quorn, or being clawed by a tiger out shooting, or toppling into some Swiss crevasse — that was her sort. But it was, after all, just a little bacillus that killed her — in her bed. She was at the top of her strength, not thirty; it seemed — idiotic." He smiled bleakly.

"Was she married, Frank?"

"No: took it all out in horses and climbing. And now, Georgy, listen! She left nearly all her personal things to me, to show, I suppose, that she was sorry the family had turned me down so frozenly. Among them were her riding things. They're stored in a safe place in camphor; I've never dared to look at them. You've no idea the trouble she took with every detail, hat, boots, spurs; though she let her mother choose all her dance frocks for her.



There they are then; but Georgy, if you will, they needn't stay there any longer."

"Frank . . ."

"Wait a minute, Georgy!" He leaned forward, his hazel eyes shining, the grotesque face with the huge nose softened to a tremulous dignity. "I feel she'd like you to have 'em. You two would have made a pair. You're about her size, though perhaps a trifle broader across the shoulders; you've the same cunning way with horses that she had; and riding's your unspoken poetry, I know, as it was hers. Why not let her help? She would if she were alive."

Georgy was silent.

"You'd be *doing* me a kindness, you understand, not taking one from me. Somehow, I know, that once I see you in her clothes, the hurt will heal."

She was still silent, although his last words had moved her deeply. It was not from hesitation, but from a strange sense that the dead girl was with them, actually in the boat, a sad but tranquil presence. She almost feared to speak, as though she would rudely break into some one's thought, not hers or Frank's. When at last she felt free, she did not reply to his offer, but put a question.

"Why is — why was — Ruth so unhappy, Frank?"

He started.

"I didn't tell you that, did I? How have you guessed it?"

"It — it — came to me somehow. I can't explain."

"Well, it's true," he said. "Ruth was a girl who let her big chance slip. There was a moment, Georgy, when she ought to have thrown prudence and convention and the family to the devil and gone to one she needed and who needed her. But she wavered and didn't, and never again was herself. She ought to have followed her impulses, not her theories."

"That's a dangerous rule, Frank," said Georgy quickly. "One can mess one's whole life up by yielding to impulses."

"Some, decidedly. Others, as decidedly not."

"Who's to tell you, then, which are which?"

"You've got to learn to tell yourself. No one can do your thinking for you."

She flicked the water with her fingers.

"I'm glad," she said at length, "that I've a career — *you* won't laugh at me, will you, Frank? — that fills me up and leaves no time for such things."

"Fills you up now, no doubt, but will it always? You'll want more some day."

"Marriage?" she laughed. "Wait till I'm the star; that'll be time enough to think about it."

"You can't order life in assorted packages from Selfridge's, my dear. But tell me, now that you and I and Ruth are friends — for it feels like that, doesn't it, almost uncannily? — may I take it that I'm to wire to London as soon as we get back to the boat-house?"

"If you really think I may wear Ruth's things, Frank . . . Oh, it's most awfully good of you! They'll be something to me no bought things could ever be. I feel as if she's a friend — as if she'll be quite excited . . ." she broke off, flushing hotly, afraid she had been sentimental.

He gazed at her a moment in astonishment. Then slowly he said:

"I've a glimmer of what you mean," and reached for the punt pole to thrust out from the bank.

He was silent for the most part of the way back; but as the wooden boathouses came into sight, he jerked out a sudden question.

"What's this about you and an elephant last night?"

"Oh! nothing. Maharanee wouldn't go into the ring."

"What's old 'Otto of Roses' for, then, except to make her?"

"He couldn't, anyhow, and the Indian was afraid; said she had the evil spirit in possession, or some nonsense, and wouldn't go near her. I'm not surprised if the evil spirit enters into Maharanee sometimes when she sees Sharif."

"There was a foul ring wait, wasn't there?"

"It looked a bit sticky. There was Otto cracking his whip and getting redder and redder; and there were the other two elephants holding out their trunks to the children in the front row, asking for buns as if it were the Zoo." She broke into her clear laugh, a little shaking Birlingham's theory of her gravity.

"And then you . . . ?"

"I had some bread in my pocket for my ponies, and offered Maharanee a piece, while she stood throwing dust on her head and snorting. She took it quick enough; and after I'd stroked her trunk a bit and given a pull at her ears the way I'd seen the Indian do, off she rolled into the ring."

"Our friend from Hamburg owes you a necklace, I think."  
She laughed again.

"Poor old Otto. He was dripping with perspiration."

"He could afford to drip quite a bit off himself. I call him the Hamburg-America Line — he goes round the globe, or nearly."

"He's a very kind man."

"Like putty, soft when you sit on him."

"I don't, Frank."

"You know what I mean," said the clown, scowling darkly. "He's good to everybody and nobody, and the only friend he'll never forsake is the brandy bottle."

"Yes, isn't it a pity he drinks too much? Such a little goes to his brain, you know."

"If he had a wife, I'd be sorry; as he's a bachelor, and I surmise, at times, a gay one, I say least head, soonest ended."

"Don't be silly, Frank."

"It's my profession."

The punt struck gently against the landing stage and he parted from Georgy to seek a telegraph office.

### 3

A fortnight later, in her own dressing room, shared with nobody now, at the Ridley Hall, Birmingham, Georgy faced the unaccustomed luxury of a full-length looking glass with delight. The short-skirted blue coat, which an Oxford tailor had widened to the set of her shoulders, the white cord breeches cut cleanly round the knees, the strong, supple boots of unvarnished leather, the plain steel spurs, all realized her dreams. With careful hands she pressed the wide-brimmed bowler down on her head; tweaked a stray lock into place, and was satisfied.

"Georgy," said Amalia, creaking in a wicker armchair, "put your little pearl earrings on."

"Mother!"

She laughed and turned back to the glass, amused at her own unwonted vanity; but glad in the same moment that she had so far escaped the bandy legs of the professional rider.

There came a knock at the door.

"Overture and Number 1!" warned a voice; and, suddenly snatching her mother to her arms and hugging her, Georgy disappeared, to parade herself before Frank Birlingham if she could find him.

A rumble of laughter, followed by a stinging battery of applause, set her heart beating when, having sought the clown in vain, she crossed the dim, iron-pillared space, piled with hurdles, striped tubs and a glimmering paper hoop, behind the entry to the ring. She felt the intentness of the crowded house beyond as if it were the crouch of a many-coiled monster she had challenged to battle, and her hands tightened on the stout hunting crop with the initials "R.B." on its silver band. The next moment the curtains squeaked back along their rods and two Spanish jugglers in orange costumes marched out onto a moonlit blue carpet. The grey prisms of the spot-limes flashed in her eyes, as they darted their fans of pale light into the ring, cleaving with crossed shafts the mound of vague heads that rose in the darkness behind. Opposite the entry shone the glowworm lights of the band, silhouetting the black conductor with busy arm. And, as Georgy peered round, the door of a high box fell open in a sudden yellow blaze, revealing the red-robed Lord Mayor and his Lady's purple flowers. The curtains swung to again and Georgy turned away glowing. She had seen her battlefield and cared nothing now except for the suspense.

The horses were stabled in a circular corridor running round at the back of the tiers, the stalls gaily lit and painted for inspection by the public. The carpeted stretch lay empty at this moment in the glare of the electrics, and as Georgy moved down it, Knight, ready saddled, but with no groom in view, glided noiselessly out of his box and paced towards her. His coat gleamed, as if polished with oil; the star blazed on his forehead; his forelegs, one of which gently pawed the carpet, wore the slim white stockings of the *haute école* horse. He looked like a prince changed by sorcery

into a dumb steed. Georgy gazed at him with a choking throat and then the grin of old Harry peeped round the stall.

"Haven't I finished him off for you, Miss?" he asked proudly.

"Oh, Harry! You are good!" she cried. "Why is every one so anxious to make me go to-night — if I don't mess it up myself?"

"Not you, Miss!" declared the old groom; "and he won't let you down, either," he added, giving Knight's haunches a last wipe with his cloth.

Georgy examined Knight thoroughly and passed on into the piebald's box. His thick coat made him less elegant than Knight, but he looked more the conventional picture of a circus horse. He was quiet and apparently happy. Georgy did not believe he would give her trouble, though she tested girths and bridle with care.

"Let's see what you look like!" said a voice, as she lingered watching Patrico.

It was Barlowe, quaint in an evening suit that fitted him nowhere, with a tie that seemed to have been ripped from a window curtain. His eyebrows went up at the sight of her.

"Not so bad!" he conceded. "Nothing striking, you know, but that blue will take the lights. Are you feeling fit?"

Footsteps thudded along the carpeted corridor.

"Number 6, Miss Dufay!" shouted a breathless lad, slithering to a stop outside the stall.

"Don't get so flustered, you damned little fool!" snapped Barlowe. "You've plenty of time, Georgy; come along!"

He walked before her as she rode Knight along the passage to the entrance, and stood by while the last act before hers drew to its close. And in those few moments panic rushed on her. How was she to meet the eyes of those thousands — alone? What would they think at being offered nothing but her, the amateur, on poor old Knight, who had never in his life been starred. What mad folly the whole thing had been! Would it not be wiser to back out even now, plead sudden illness? Anything was better, surely, than to disgrace the show. She wanted to dismount, but felt too weak even to lift a foot from the stirrup. It was hopeless to go on now, anyhow; she could not even remember what they were to do first. Where was her mother? She turned her head and tried to speak to Barlowe who looked up enquiringly; but her dry

throat made no sound. Perspiration beaded her forehead, and it was only through a mist that she saw a groom with a great card pass through the curtains to raise her number on the stand. Then, small but distinct, a girl's voice spoke in her ear. "It's all right; come on, Georgyl!" it said; and, as the band broke into the first lilting bars of the *Pigue Dame* Overture, Knight, of himself, without waiting for her signal, danced out, with his forelegs twinkling, into the ring.

It was an effective entry, rehearsed to weariness under the dingy day of canvas; now, in the glamour of the lights, enhanced by the grace of her tall form in the blue and white habit, it won swift response in an early round of clapping. At the sound Georgyl's brain cleared; her nervousness fell away; and, her serious face lit up by a frank smile, she guided Knight surely through his next figures. But he scarcely seemed to need prompting; as though proud to help, he passed from step to step without fault. The audience, cloaked in the gloom beyond the dazzling ring lights, slipped from her mind as she rode; she felt only the motion of her beloved comrade and gave herself up to the joy of her union with him. Through the rhythmic ecstasy she was but faintly conscious of the growing hum of appreciation; so that, when at length she turned Knight into the centre and made him kneel for the *salut*, the applause broke loose with a noise that startled her. Gravely she raised the handle of her crop to her hat.

After this, the second part of the act was plain sailing. She guided Knight round to a waltz measure in circles on his hind legs; made the round of the ring with his forefeet on the red fence, and set him rearing at a touch. It seemed, when she suddenly laughed with her head thrown back, as though she were calling the audience to share the thrill and the fun. Her simplicity changed the hot hall, with its grim iron pillars, its sizzling lights and reek of orange peel, to a wind-swept countryside, through which the hounds poured to the notes of the horn. Youth and strength ran free for a moment through the veins of all who watched.

Then, amid renewed tumult, she was back in the entry, receiving hurried handshakes as she slid from the saddle. Foremost in the group stood an enormous cock, all feathers and crimson comb, but with an unmistakable hazel eye behind its beak. "Well done,



Georgy!" and "Thank *you*, Frank!", was all they had time to exchange, for the grooms were setting up the hurdles and Harry brought Patrico with a run to the entrance. She swung up, and the piebald, veering sideways, flew joyously over the four jumps placed round the ring. The hurdles were whisked away, and a pair of white posts set up in the centre with a moveable crossbar. Over this Patrico, racing with beating hoofs from the far end of the space beyond the entrance, made several leaps after each of which the bar was raised some inches. The house grew more intent as the height increased; and when, at length, the ringmaster boldly announced that "Miss Dufay on Patrico will now take the highest jump yet seen in the ring in this country", there was burst of cheering. Georgy set her teeth as the great horse bounded forward for the last of the prearranged leaps, but he lifted himself so cleanly over that a daring impulse seized her. Riding to the edge of the ring, she ordered the bar to be raised yet another half-foot. The ringmaster stared, but at her imperious gesture obeyed; while the audience, who had noticed the brief dispute, clapped her loudly. She cantered defiantly off into the entry, to be checked by Barlowe's sudden hand on her reins.

"Georgy!" he cried in a stern voice at her knee. "Don't spoil it all now. You'll fall, you little fool!"

"I shan't, Mr. Barlowe!" she panted, bending from the saddle. "We've done it before. Let me try: my luck's in to-night!"

A clamour was heard from the front and the manager yielded.

"Your risk!" he warned her. "But go on, girl, go on!"

She touched Patrico lightly with both spurs; he sprang forward, and, collecting himself at the bar on his mighty haunches, leapt over in a streaming black and white arch.

She dismounted amid a roar that drowned the shout of the ringmaster giving the height; the Lord Mayor rose, clapping demonstratively, and performers and ring hands thronged round her in congratulation. She took her last call feeling ready to laugh and cry together, and waving her hand towards the two horses, held by Harry in the entrance. Then, as she passed out with trembling knees between the curtains, her mother stepped forward through the crowd and embraced her with the kiss of a tragedy queen.



She began to be afraid she would never get her room clear in time to change for the pony act, to which Barlowe still bound her. First, Amalia had been taken with a fit of faintness in her arm-chair and she had had to go out and look for *sal volatile*. Then Frank, bare-headed above the neck of his cock's dress, had peeped round the door and asked leave to bring in a swarm of admirers from the medical school, who theorised about the art of the circus until she had to beg them to let her go behind a curtain to change. They took the hint, and she was at last able to throw on her silk dress, wondering a little, as she did so, why Otto Riegelmann, usually so cordial a friend, had not appeared at all this evening to greet her; but, just as she took the horn to her court slipper, an authoritative knock and the manager's voice sounded outside, and she had to unbolt the door again.

"Capital, Georgy, capital!" declared Barlowe, "though, mind you, I said before, and I still say, you've no right to put in what hasn't been rehearsed. It's forbidden in your contract and I've seen it lead to accidents, time out of number. Still, that last jump hit 'em hard — what was the height, again? . . . He's the devil of a lepper, that piebald: we ought to enter him for all the big Horse Shows. And thoroughly ring-trained too, when he was young, by somebody; I saw that before I bought him. You needn't hustle; I've put the ponies last but one this evening."

An agitated tattoo fell startlingly on the floor and Barlowe shouted, "Come in!"

The whip, the glittering silk hat and scarlet tailcoat of the ringmaster dived round the panel.

"Beg pardon, Miss Dufay; beg pardon, Mr. Barlowe," he began, "but I think you ought to come, sir, at once. It's those damned elephants again, sir! It's nearly time to call them, the Intermission's finishing; but it's my belief, as things look, that they won't ever get on at all."

"Send for Mr. Riegelmann, then, can't you? Why the devil do you come bothering me, Lushcombe? What's wrong, anyhow?"

"The big one, sir, Maharanee. I've never seen her look so ugly. There, listen to that!"

He turned an apprehensive head to the door, which he still held ajar. Up the staircase there floated from far below, a pealing trumpet note. Barlowe frowned.

"She goes on like that," said Lushcombe. "They're noticing it from the front; it drowns the band, and . . . well, sir, they don't like it. If they get panicky, a crowd like this . . ."

"But where is Mr. Riegelmann?" exploded Barlowe. "Doesn't he know it's his business to keep his animals in order?"

"I'm afraid," said Lushcombe, with a malicious grin, "there's precious little to be got out of him. He's in his room . . . well . . . hardly himself." He winked and tilted his head back, thumb to lips.

"Good God!" muttered Barlowe. "Then where's his bloody Indian?"

"On a tub at the far end of the stables," answered the ringmaster. "Shivering and snivelling and won't budge an inch. I kicked him good and hard, sir, and shook him too. But I'm afraid it's N.G. with him as well."

Another shrill burst of trumpeting came from below, as Barlowe, with the others at his heels, went out onto the dimly lit landing and leant over the black gulf of the bannisters to listen. The squeal ended in a deep-throated blare that wafted with it the eerie menace of the nocturnal jungle, and was followed by the unmistakable high murmur of a crowd alarmed.

"Come on!" cried Barlowe, and disappeared down the stair, the red tails of the ringmaster bobbing behind him.

"Mr. Barlowe!" cried Georgy, following, "may I come too? Maharanee knows me."

She had no answer, but kept at their heels, as they hurried through the bright horse stables into the sombre, high-vaulted elephant stalls behind. Round the entry to these a small crowd swayed and chattered, grooms, assistants and dressers jostling two ostrich-plumed clowns and a bareback rider, who peered on her sandalled toes over the men's shoulders. Nobody seemed to relish going into the stalls, from the end of which came continuous bellowing, mixed with angry thumps. Maharanee was here, behind a thick timber partition, her trunk appearing from time to time like a writhing serpent, as it crashed against the woodwork.

Barlowe shoved men and women aside and plunged into the stables, still followed by the ringmaster and Georgy. The two smaller elephants were swaying from side to side, swinging their heads with a motion like that of a disturbed sea, but showing yet no worse signs of viciousness. When Barlowe reached Maharanee at the end, he stood for a moment, with his hand on the wooden bar that closed the mouth of her stall, looking upwards with a puzzled expression. High over his squat figure the huge head rocked frenziedly to and fro, the little pointed underlip, grown with straggling hairs, hanging tremulous from the red cavern of the mouth, the small eyes gleaming and vanishing malignantly with the swaying of the grey, flapping ears. Barlowe ducked as the trunk descended, flail-like, from above, cutting the air where his head had just been, and hit with tremendous force against the partition. The wood cracked across, and a frightened squeal resounded from the elephant in the next box. Barlowe stood back and looked round blankly.

"It's beyond me," he growled. "Cut out the act, Lushcombe, and keep the show going."

Lushcombe pointed his whip at Maharanee's left hind leg, which was chained to a ring in the floor.

"Look!" he murmured.

The elephant was giving little kicks and tugs at the chain, as if testing its resistance.

"She's trying it out," whispered Lushcombe. "If she pulls the ring up, and it's my belief she's quite powerful enough, then in the state she's in . . ."

"Good Gawd!" said Barlowe. "And the Lord Mayor here too!"

In their consternation neither had noticed the flash of pink silk as Georgy slipped under the wooden bar and stood up amid the soiled litter of the stall, calling Maharanee's name in a high voice. The elephant paused, listening, her trunk furled above her head, and ceased to roar.

"Maharaneel!" cried Georgy again. "What's the matter with you, old lady? Come here, then!"

She held out a hand, her bare arm gleaming white against the dark cliff of the monster's hide. With a curling motion the annulated trunk sank down, its pink, prehensile tip flickering from

side to side. Georgy caught it in both hands and stroked it. Slaver dripped over her wrists, while a low muttering, of pain and protest rather than fury, came through the bulging throat.

"What is it, then?" she asked, as if caressing a great dog. "Can't you tell me, old lady? Don't be wild about it."

Maharanee moaned once more and Georgy saw the little eyes regarding her. "If only you could speak!" she thought, while she gently fingered the great, leaf-shaped ear. Then a figure dived under the barrier and stood up on the other side of the elephant.

It was Riegelmann, his braided tunic undone at the throat, his hair still dank from the bucket of water into which a groom had had the daring to plunge his head. His fingers fumbled with his heavy, coiled whip, as he laid his hand timidly on Maharanee's other ear, muttering to her in German.

"What's the matter with her?" Georgy called to him across the quivering trunk.

Riegelmann looked harassed.

"How come you here, Chorche?" he asked. "There is nothing can be done when she has one of these fits. Looks! She is still *verrückt!*"

He had touched Maharanee inadvertently beneath the ear with the stock of his whip. A shudder heaved all along the mighty spine; her eyes glared round, and she swayed back, as if to elude the contact with either of them.

"Gently, Maharanee, gently!" pleaded Georgy, hanging onto the other ear. "Is she hungry?" she demanded of the trainer.

"*Nein! Nein!* She has had the full day's rations. *Aber was ist los, denn?*" he whispered more to himself than to the elephant, looking helplessly up at her and then around him.

Georgy gave a little cry.

"Oh, look!" she cried. "Come round here!"

Riegelmann slipped gingerly round the trunk and came to her side. She was holding up the hairy, corrugated flap with a look of distress. From a little red hole in the tender skin beneath the ear a thread of blood was oozing; all around the skin was scraped and scarred.

"That's it!" she cried. "I should have guessed!"

A shout came from the bystanders gathered round the barrier.

Riegelmann had unwisely laid his hand on the wound, and Maharanee, belching a terrifying squeal, backed thudding against the hind wall of the stable. Riegelmann, with a scared cry, slipped to safety under the barrier, while the maddened beast smote at him with her trunk and bent her foreleg to kick. Georgy, still gripping her ear, was swung forward, and stumbling against some hard object that stuck out from under the trough upon the floor, fell against the slimy wall. Gleaming at her feet she saw the Indian's iron-tipped goad, still wet with blood. Maharanee thundered furiously overhead when she tried to pick it up; so, driving it under the barrier with her foot, she darted beneath, herself, to the further side.

The watchers gave back, perceiving from her furrowed forehead and teeth closed on her lip that she had a plan. She waved them still further away; then, picking up the goad, advanced alone to the bar. "Maharanee!" she called, raising the weapon in both hands before her. The elephant's ear jerked, and with throaty whinings she lurched forward, tugging at her captive hind leg. Promptly Georgina brought the shaft of the goad down with all the force of her muscles across her raised knee. She felt the wood crack, and with a jerk of her strong wrists wrenched it in two, holding up the broken pieces before Maharanee's glowering eyes. Then she tossed the fragments into the refuse bin at the mouth of the stall.

"By God!" exclaimed Barlowe. "She understands, the old hag! By God, if she doesn't!"

Maharanee was solemnly wagging her head up and down, an air of appeasement in her whole behaviour. Wheedlingly, her trunk curled out over the barrier and picked at Georgy's sleeve. Riegelmann, behind, thrust a lump of currant-loaf into the girl's hand, and she began to feed her. The bystanders, with laughs and ejaculations, dispersed about their work.

Barlowe turned on the German.

"You weren't much on the spot, Mr. Riegelmann!"

Otto humped his shoulders with a scolded air that it was hard not to pity.

"Are you ready for your act?" enquired Barlowe.

Riegelmann shook his head.

"I don't think it would be safe, Mr. Barlowe," he stammered. "Maharanee seems quiet now, yes. But after such a disturbance . . ."

"Then you can pack up to-night and leave! I give you your choice. Go on with your beasts in five minutes according to your contract or clear out. No. I'll hear nothing. It's up to you to control your own animals; if you can't do it, the quicker we part the better — and mind, if there's harm done by them to-night, it's you I hold responsible!"

"But Mr. Barlowe!" wailed Otto, flinging out despairing arms, "you're not reasonable . . ."

His voice fell impotent on the back of the manager, who was scurrying away to meet his next problem. Otto rolled his shallow eyes round wildly in quest of a rescuing sail, and Georgy felt a wave of maternal solicitude to see him so humiliated and resourceless.

"We can do it, Otto," she called to him. "Look, Maharanee's as good as gold now. I'll bring her into the ring myself with you, if you like, and stand by."

"But Sharif . . ."

"Had better not poke his dirty nose in, Otto, while I'm about. If he comes, I go, that's flat!"

"But Chorche, suppose, only think, if Maharanee runs amok among all the people . . ."

"She won't," asserted Georgy, "and if she did, well, you've got to take your chances. She's bound to get busy on us first, in any case; let's hope that'll give them time to get the house cleared."

"Chorche, are you mad to talk such things? It's an awful danger, yes, dreadful!"

She walked up to him and seized his shaking arm as he mopped his forehead with a vermilion silk handkerchief.

"Otto, you heard what Barlowe said. If you refuse to go on, what'll be left of your reputation? Riegelmann's Elephants — finished! We mustn't let it come to that, must we?"

"Fery well, Chorche." Like a bleak shore caught by a gleam of winter sunshine, he seemed to draw encouragement from her nerve. "I'll try, if we must. But you must stand by me; you will,



won't you, Chorche? It's a perfectly offul risk! If I could only get a glass of something to steady my nerfs . . ."

"Your nerve will be far better without it, Otto. Come now, in twenty minutes we'll be laughing at the whole business."

And it went as she had said. Maharanee, at a touch on the ear from Georgy's hand, stalked grandly out of her stall and moved without hesitation towards the ring. Only once did she check, uttering a truculent blast, when the crooked shadow of the Indian wavered on the wall of the empty loose box where he was hiding.

"Get away, you little beast!" shouted Georgy, and the shadow whipped out of sight again.

"Come along, Maharanee!" she said, and, with a sly toot, the elephant rolled forward again on her majestic way.

All through the act Georgy stood and moved close by Maharanee, while Riegelmann prompted her in a low voice. It seemed to her that the elephants had never worked more smoothly. They lumbered almost friskily round the ring, and she could have sworn the tiny eyes twinkled like those of school children freed from a bullying master. The applause and laughter of the large audience flowed over the ring fence, warm and regular; and after a while Otto's brow cleared and he even began to preen himself and smile back at the house with something of his usual complacency. The clashing of the elephantine orchestra died away, and the moment came when Maharanee should lift the trainer in her trunk for the processional exit. Riegelmann, however, stood still in the centre, shaking his head at Georgy. She was looking at him for guidance, when she felt a soft coil round her waist, and glancing down, she saw that she was locked in Maharanee's trunk. Slowly the elephant swung her off her feet. Riegelmann's face changed to horror and he sprang forward with lifted whip and opened mouth.

"It's all right," panted Georgy, before he could shout. "Don't frighten her, *please!*"

Maharanee lifted her right up over her head; and Georgy, with her queer gift of divining animal thoughts, caught hold of it somehow and twisted round till her knees sank in behind the great aprons of the ears and she was riding the neck as she had

seen the Indian do. The public, taking this for rehearsed business, clapped approvingly; while Maharanee, bearing Georgy in triumph and with the other two following, as usual, trunks joined to tails, stalked out at the head of the bulky grey festoon. Once through the entry, she knelt for Georgy to dismount, as though she had carried her for a lifetime.

Riegelmann came trotting out behind them and seized both Georgy's hands while he poured out his incoherent thanks.

"Chorche! Chorche! You haf safed the show! Riegelmann's Elephants! *Ja!* You haf safed them! *Aber es war wunderbar!* You might have been making with the elephants all your life! I shall tell your mother! Chorche, I can't find words now to say what I want . . . to tell you my gratitude."

She cut him short, smiling, still maternally, at his flushed face.

"It's all right, Otto!" she kept assuring him. "It was nothing to make a fuss about, between pals, you know! Now let me find something to put on Maharanee's sore place."

Otto, his hands clasping and unclasping round the handle of his elephant whip, turned in his excitement to Watts, who happened to stand beside him.

"*Aber was für ein Mädchen!*" he gabbled. "I tell you she might haf been making with the elephants all her life. *Prachtvoll! Himmlisch!*"

"Quite so-ski," replied the old clown impassively.

5

The rest of the Birmingham week was a triumph for Georgy. She was given the place of honour on the programme, last number before the interval; each night she was loudly cheered by a contingent from the University, who embarrassed her, further, with gifts of chocolate and flowers; she had her first Press notices, and her photograph, sitting Knight in his rearing pose, appeared on the picture page of both the chief papers. But when the circus went out under canvas again, she found that she was treated differently. She was put back to her original place in the programme; she was made to ride again among the "utilities" in the horse quadrille; and Barlowe seemed to watch for excuses to grumble

at her. She did not realise that this was because he dreaded her developing into a star and claiming a star's salary, and began to feel discouraged and to doubt herself.

It was in this mood one night that, at a large midland town beyond Birmingham, she let herself into her lodgings after the show, thinking distastefully of the stale sardines awaiting her and resolving to go supperless to bed. When the door swung open, however, the fragrance of a cigar came down the narrow staircase, and a smile began to chase her fatigue away as she climbed up to the sitting room.

Otto Riegelmann was in the armchair, talking to her mother on the sagging sofa, and looking his cheerful best in a brown suit with tie and socks chosen to shade. His hair was carefully curled across his forehead, his hands shinningly manicured. A scent of *eau de cologne* came from him as he rose to shake hands, and Georgy felt his neatness a reproach to her own state after a day in the dust of the circus.

"I must smarten myself up a bit, Otto, if you're here," she said, moving towards the bedroom; but he checked her, carrying her hand to his lips and away again with a butterfly gesture.

"Not at all, but not at all!" he fluted. "You are jost fine as you are, Chorche; isn't she, Madame? But I can see you are tired. You must haf some supper and a glass of Niersteiner; it will do you goot."

Georgy glanced at the table, where on one of their clean blue-and-white checked napkins a long roll of Viennese bread, a dish of delicately sliced sausage and a creamy potato salad from a local German *restaurateur* took the place of the dreaded filmy sardines. The narrow-necked hock bottle, and another of cognac, with gleaming gold and red label, crowned the array, and Otto, with the air of a host, began to fill her glass.

Georgy decided to ask no questions for the present; but took off her coat and, with appetite revived, sat down to supper.

"I came to-night, Chorche," Otto went on, hovering round her like a waiter, "to see your dear mother and yourself and to haf the opportunity of drinking your health." He did this with gusto, and went on, wiping his lips with his silk handkerchief, "You see you haf never really gifen me the chance to thank you as I ought

for all you did in Birmingham to help me with my show when that rascal Sharif got drunk."

Georgy tapped her fork impatiently on her plate.

"Oh! Not again, Otto, please. We won't go back to that any more." She went on with her supper in silence, the other two watching her.

"Got a match, Otto?" she asked at length, as she finished and rose to look for her cigarettes on the mantelshelf.

"You had better not smok', Georgy," murmured Amalia, as the German produced a silver matchbox with an Imperial Crown and Eagle on it — "a gift from the Kaiser when I appeared before him at Berlin before the War," he told her proudly.

Georgy sat down again and kicked her brogues off her tired feet.

"Tell me some news, Otto," she said; "what makes you so silent?"

They still sat eyeing her, calculatingly, it seemed, as she pushed her long toes into a pair of frail, gold-embroidered Turkish slippers that her mother had bought for her at a cheap bazaar. At length Riegelmann spoke with a wave of his cigar towards Amalia.

"You tell her, Madame. It will come best from you who haf always advised her so well."

"Georgina, attend!" said her mother solemnly. "Mr. Riegelmann wishes to take you into partnership."

"Partnership?"

"In Riegelmann's Elephants! A big thing, you know, Chorche!"

"You mean to work your act with you? Always? But it's impossible! I know nothing at all about elephants."

"*Achl!*" Riegelmann waved his plump white hand in the air. "You! You might haf been making with elephants all your life, as I told you before."

"Yes, but what about my riding?"

"Keep it up! Keep it up! *Natürlich!* The more we two can do together, the better money from that *verdamm't* old Barlowe of yours, and the others, *nicht wahr?*" He bent forward towards the girl, twinkling cunningly and turning a little pink. "You could ride as Chorchina Dufay, you know, and if you want to, Chorche — you could work the elephants with me as my . . ."

Amalia made an abrupt movement and cleared her throat. Otto concluded vaguely, spreading his palms,

"... as my partner, any name you like to make."

He turned and grinned at Amalia. Georgy, plunged in doubt, and prodding a chink in the fender with the curved point of her slipper, did not observe the byplay.

"I don't think it would suit me," she said at length. "Horses are my line."

"And if," coaxed Riegelmann, "I were to buy you a horse specially for our new act, what then?"

Georgy turned round, her eyes alight.

"Would you, Otto?" she asked.

"Yes; let me explain. With elephants, like all else, you must now and then make a change. I am beginning to think that we are getting a little stale. And so, Chorche . . . but, mind you, I can only do it if you help me . . . I mean next year to create a new act altogether: 'Riegelmann's Elephants, with his Horses and Dogs.' I shall write to my friend Hagenbeck at Hamburg to send me a nice little Arab horse, trained to work elephant, and two good dogs. Maharanee and Grete haf been with dogs before; they will be all right. Then we make together a fine Oriental scenario. I shall be Rajah, with turban, earrings, *cummerbund*, so!" — he puffed out his stomach — "and you Chorche, you are so graceful, Indian Page riding to horse in cloth-of-gold. We will haf *howdahs*, stars, trappings on the elephants; look, I haf made some drawings!"

He pulled out his pocketbook and showed some beautifully-finished sketches of Indian dresses and armour and bedizened elephants' heads.

"You drew these yourself, Otto?" cried Georgy, delighted by the neat little pictures.

"*Ja wohl!* Of course, I can draw."

"You *are* tempting me, Otto!" Georgy laid the sketches down, the corners of her mouth breaking into little smiles. "Will it be a real Arab?"

"Wort of honour, yes!"

"Mother," asked Georgy, "what ought I to do?"

"Oh! *Dio mio!* Why ask me? You know you will do just what you want. But still, if you ask my opinion, Georgette, Mr. Riegel-

mann, I t'ink it is a splendid t'ing for you both. It is not well for you, Georgette, to be alone. You 'ave an illness, an accident, a trouble whatevaire wit' your 'orse and you are *out*. Dere! Am I not right, Mr. Riegelmann? And you, too, you want a 'elper you can trust, not one 'oo drinks or runs away wit'out warning, eh? Now, I know my Georgina. She is one for de work, though it is I 'oo say it. She 'as been a good girl since my poor George went, looking well aftaire 'er poor old mod'er, and always regulaire at de work, yes, always! Now, you ask me? I say, you two come toget'aire; you won't regret it."

"For how long?" asked Georgy.

"Oh, Chorche!" Riegelmann's smile was like ripe fruit ready to burst. "I don't want to think of ending the partnership, efer."

"You must sack Sharif."

"If you wish, to-morrow, the rascal! Think of it, Chorche, *Riegelmann's Elephants with his Horses and Dogs, in a Grand Oriental Spectacle!*"

"No! That won't do!" Georgina sprang up, tapping her fingers for a moment on her forehead. "Yes, I've got it! *Riegelmann's Far-Famed Elephants and Dogs, with the Young Maharajah* — that's me, my dear! — *on his trained Arab Horse.*"

"Good, Georgette!" put in Amalia, nodding.

"Yes! I accept! Splendid, Chorche!" Riegelmann seized both her hands and pumped them up and down. "I shall write to Hagenbeck immediately. And now, goodness, I am all hot! Let us sit down and haf a quiet smoke."

He offered Georgy one of his gold-tipped Egyptians, opened his cigar pouch, and filled the liqueur glasses all round again.

Georgy sat watching him through her cigarette smoke; in the near future he was to become, she realized, the centre of her life. She was not apt at analysis, but she vaguely perceived that a great part of his charm for her lay in the air of a wider world that he brought with him into her narrow existence. He filled the dingy lodgings with the aroma of security and success that flowed from his expensively dressed person. Yet she had seen him in dire straits; she could hardly credit it now, as she leant back, with one elegant, pointed brown boot thrown across his knee, his brow as sunny and his eyes as clear as if he had never known humilia-



tion. But he had in her eyes a mental as well as a material superiority. He had travelled much and was a great newspaper reader. In *cafés* and other company he loved to discuss the dramatic issues of world politics. He could tell you who had really caused the last war and where the next was even now brewing. Had he not, peeping through the raised blind of a sleeping car, seen one of the lonely Russian frontier stations, guarded by sentries with bayonets, where the Bolshevist Government had built its special long platforms for the rapid entrainment of troops and guns against Poland? He had hobnobbed with an ex-chief of Viennese police on the quay at Constantinople and had learnt the truth (known to no other living man, he affirmed) about the *crime passionnel* at Mayerling and the death of the Archduke Rudolf. He had particulars of the secret operation upon Mussolini at Milan, which had preserved the *Duce* to Italy for ten more years; in Bombay he had worked in a circus side by side with the actual writer of the Dreyfus *bordereau* — "Who would believe it, Madame?" — and, steaming from Tokyo to San Francisco, had made out at dawn, from behind the shelter of a ventilation shaft, the new Japanese submarine bases for the coming conflict with America.

Georgy listened, credulous and fascinated, until a peculiarly shrill laugh roused her from her absorption. Assuming a partner's freedom, she took the nearly empty cognac bottle from the table and thrust it into a cupboard.

"Georgina!" exclaimed her mother with shocked severity, while Riegelmann raised his eyebrows in whimsical ruefulness.

"Sorry, Mother," said Georgy, "but it's bedtime for us all, don't you think so, Otto?" She smiled amicably at him. "I'll light you downstairs."

Below in the little hall, she turned and faced him.

"One thing you must let me tell you straight out, Otto. I won't keep a drunken man for my partner."

"Chorche! How could you? Oh! How rude! I never in my life . . ."

"Sorry if I seem rude, partner; but this is a serious business for both of us, isn't it? And that night at Birmingham you know, as well as I do, you weren't in a fit state to carry on."

"No! No! You are quite wrong," he gabbled. "I had had offul

indigestion with headache, and I took a little cognac, jost to see if it would put me right."

"Two bottles of brandy aren't good for indigestion or for headache either, partner."

"Well, my dear, if you are going to despise me . . ."

She laid a hand on his arm.

"I despise you, Otto? Why, you're miles over my head in knowledge, in cleverness — look at those sketches you showed us to-night — in fact, in everything. You've been in our business, Otto, many more years than I have months, yes, and I'm more grateful than I can say to you for taking me in. But haven't you learnt one thing, with all your experience, that we circus people must be masters of ourselves or else smash?"

"Well, Chorche, I haf been so dreadfully lonely. If only I had met a girl like you before, a beautiful girl to inspire me!"

She took a step back, appalled.

"For God's sake, Otto, don't get sloppy now, at this time of night! Is it the cognac? There, take your hat, sleep it off! Remember, to-morrow early I want to be introduced, properly this time, to the elephants."

Her manly handclasp seemed to abash him.

"Good-night, Chorche," he murmured humbly. "But do come to-morrow early — to see the elephants."

Georgy went back to her mother and stood looking at her with a mischievous smile.

"Mother darling, did Otto talk to you before I came in about any other form of partnership besides a business one?"

Amalia shot a furtive glance upwards at her daughter's expression and then looked peevishly at the scalloped red paper stuffing the grate.

"Georgina," she said in a low voice, "don't you go and be a little fool."

"I don't mean to be, Mother." With a tiny grimace at the back of Amalia's head, she walked into the bedroom.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### I

"MORNING! No intrusion. What?" Birlingham thrust his huge nose round the corner of the studio door in Camden Town, his eye gleaming under the brim of his golden velours hat.

"Come along," invited Franklin, whose small, swarthy head was intent on the clay he was kneading with brown fingers stained to grey.

Georgy had at last redeemed her promise to give him sittings. She had returned to London at the end of Barlowe's tour; been engaged for four weeks at Christmas at the Coburg Palace; and was now busy rehearsing with Otto for the new elephant act that they were to take out with Barlowe in the spring.

"My word! George the First and Only!" chuckled the clown, as he strolled into the bare, stuffy room of which only one window could be made to open, despite the heat of the glowing coke stove. "My word, you've some charger there, haven't you?"

Georgy, in her blue coat, was perched upon a dummy of stuffed leather and wooden joints, which Franklin had propped up on his sofa as if rearing; while beside him, pinned to the wall, he kept the photograph of Knight and her in this very poise, which he had cut from one of the Birmingham newspapers. The pose attracted him by its suggestion of the shattered Epidaurus Amazon, which hung on the opposite wall, but it was terribly tiring for his sitter.

"Whoa! then, my beauty!" pursued Birlingham, feeding her mount with imaginary oats from his hat. "Wouldn't old Knight be jealous to see you?"

"I believe he would," declared Franklin, his eyes still on the mod-

elling board. "That horse of yours is human, Georgy. I was round taking sketches of him one night in the stables at the Coburg. He moped all the time till you came downstairs; but up went his ears as soon as your step came along the passage."

"Oh, yes," said Birlingham, "we're all cut out by Knight. He's positively the only male thing Georgy has a weakness for."

"Jealous, Frank?" enquired Georgy, still staring dutifully between the dummy horse's inexistent ears.

He grinned.

"Not a scrap. Knight's a white man. I'd trust him to take you to America and back safely."

Franklin straightened himself and stepped back a moment to survey his work. Birlingham seized the opportunity to bend down and scrutinize the model with keen, almost professional, closeness.

"Quite satisfied?" asked the sculptor.

"It's coming, isn't it?" said the clown, ignoring his irony. "You're getting her 'God-damme!' expression when she throws her head back after bringing off some extra teasing little stunt. Sorry, old girl! I know that's not your vocabulary; but the George we talk to has no notion of the pride there is in the George that tittups into the ring every night. Well," — he flung himself with a sudden spring onto his back in the middle of Franklin's blue and red striped divan — "how's the Elephant and Castle?" He sketched a vast circumference with his hands. "It was high tide in the moat last night, I can tell you."

"Want to rest, Georgy?" asked Franklin, noticing a stir of discomfort in his model.

Georgy slid off the dummy and walked over to Birlingham.

"What do you mean," she asked, "about the moat? It's a feeble joke, Frank, anyway."

"Rotten," assented the Clown. "But I mean, my dear, that he, Sir Otto di Monte Rotondo; I, your poor bedesman; and His Grace the Archbishop Frederic, were keeping it up till the chime of the milk bottles at His Grace's apartment last night."

She frowned.

"But Otto promised me he would go straight home."

"No doubt he did," responded Birlingham coolly. "No doubt he often will again, with results as per invoice annexed."

"You ought to be ashamed to encourage him, Frank!"

"I am. But tell us, Georgy, what did you think of the trinket? — By the way, many happy returns!"

"He didn't show *that* off to you two?"

"Jolly lucky he did, since it was I who fished it out of the bottom of his glass and ran downstairs with it, while Frederigo — always the perfect host — was busy in the hall helping the hat-stand into Otto's overcoat."

"But what was this trinket?" Franklin enquired, trying to divert the talk from a scene that he could see distressed Georgy.

"One elephant *couchant, diamanté; eyes gules*, that is to say, rubies; toenails, topaz; the whole suitable as a tiepin for the purser of a P. & O. boat, but apparently intended as a brooch for a young lady on her twenty-first birthday."

"First, it was very kind of him," retorted Georgy; "secondly, it was a little joke that we both understand; thirdly, it's no earthly business of yours what presents I get."

"Fourthly, no earthly mind can conjecture where he got it, even in the Mile End Road. Amen," concluded Birlingham. "But I'm ticked off proper, Georgy. On with the dance! Franklin champs, you can hear him!"

Georgy resumed her pose and the sculptor worked awhile in silence.

"Do you know," he remarked at length, "that Joe Rixen's back in England?"

"Good God, no!" Birlingham bounced up on the middle of the divan, and "Where is he?" cried Georgy, turning her head with a startled look.

The artist gazed from one to the other with innocent eyes.

"What's the matter with you two? Have I put my foot in it?"

"Where," began Birlingham virulently, "have you been seeing that poisonous and slithy tove?"

"Where everybody else does, I suppose," said Franklin, "in a circus."

"In London?" It was Georgy's voice, high with anxious excitement.

"No: I haven't seen him since he's been over. Blayne told me he was here: but he doesn't know what he's come for. I saw him

last in Paris, over the Easter holidays, at the Cirque Medrano — quite a haunt of the highbrow these days. You'd go well there, Frank! He was doing one of those extraordinary pantomimes of his. You remember *The Goblin Picnic*, eh, Georgy? — Well, this was crazier still. It was a night scene with a line of housetops and a paper moon with a weeping Pierrot face hanging from a pole. Suddenly Joe Rixen appeared from nowhere among the chimney pots, a skeleton in a black tailcoat, with a white top hat tilted to one side of his skull. He carried a fiddle and made the most appalling, squealing music until two black cats appeared and howled at him. Then a chimney stack turned into a steel-bound chest, which he prised open, and took out handfuls of treasure. He heaved the chest onto his back, gloating, and by some trick it became a coffin — ghastly! Next, a bottle kept appearing and disappearing at different places on the roofs, which he tried to clutch, while the cats mocked him with their fiery eyes and could be seen drinking out of barrels themselves. You know, there was dipsomania in every jerk he gave . . . one can't describe it!"

"No need to," murmured Birlingham. "I know the swine — the genius, I should say. Go on."

"Well, two attic windows flew open, and an old man and an old woman in nightcaps popped out, threatening him. He rushed at them, seized the tassels of their caps and pulled their heads off — dummies, you understand — to throw at the cats. After that, what? . . . Yes, I remember. A patch of moonshine and a spirit dancing there in white Taglioni skirts."

"Eth Vaughan," said Georgy softly.

"Well, the bogey man tried to embrace her; but at the very moment he clasped her, she too changed into a skeleton, and, with a Jane Eyre screech, the two of them fell, turning over and over, through a transparency in a house wall, till they seemed to touch bottom with a crash from the drums that made everybody jump. And there you saw a gravestone with the two cats grinning, one each side of it!"

"Jolly!" grunted Birlingham. "Nice show to take the kids to for the holidays! That sort of thing's not clownship, old boy."

"Perhaps not," agreed the sculptor. "It was devilish significant, though!"



"Significant of what?" drawled Birlingham, staring at the ceiling.

"The abyss that lies in each one of us. Read your Freud!"

"To put it more simply for the uneducated of Isis, you suspect the man's a maniac."

"And a murderous one;" the sculptor turned and nodded to the clown.

There was a little sigh and a slithering sound. The two men turned their heads sharply and saw Georgy lying on the rug at the foot of the dummy horse.

"Good God!" cried Franklin, "I've made her sit too long!"

They rushed to lift her on to the divan.

"Why the devil do you keep your room so frowsty?" asked Birlingham, as he tried to unloose her stock. "I feel suffocated here too, you know!"

"The pose is too trying," said Franklin penitently, as he removed her hat. She was very white and her eyes did not open. "I'll fetch some water!" He dashed into the passage.

"It's hellish queer, all the same," thought Birlingham, as he chafed her hands. "Was it really the heat? She's no fragile child; she didn't look half as bad as this the day that crazy piebald tossed her over his head. Was it his tale about Joe Rixen? If so, why? What's the mystery here, I wonder? . . . Ah, got some water, old man? Let's see now!"

In a few minutes Georgy opened her eyes and rose on her elbow, bewildered. She stared round the studio and remembered where she was.

"Have I been fainting?" she asked. "Yes, I remember coming over all giddy and sick. But what made me go off? I don't understand."

"You've been posing too long in an unfair position," said Birlingham, "and you're not a professional model. This studio's dreadfully close too; the windows won't open."

"What were we talking about?" asked Georgy suddenly.

"When?" enquired Birlingham with a blank face, interrupting Franklin as he opened his mouth. "Before you went off? Oh, nothing much. He's not a loquacious laddie, Franklin, when he's at work. I was humming, I believe: perhaps that upset you, if you

are musical. Now you'd better lie still awhile, before you go home."

While Franklin drew a wet cloth over his model, Birlingham sat down behind her and bored into the back of her head with his keen hazel eyes, as though trying to pierce to her burden of thoughts and memories.

Georgy said nothing about her swoon to her mother, when she got home to their rooms, for fear of frightening her. But late that night, when both had been in their beds some hours, Amalia was roused by some one clutching her arm. She sat up, muttering and grumbling in the ray of the elaborately shaded and guarded nightlight upon which she always insisted, and saw her daughter, tall in her pyjamas, staring down at her with dark, vacant eyes.

"Mother!" she kept saying, "Mother! The man with the false eye. He's trying to get in!"

"Georgette, what is the matter wit' you? Are you mad?"

"Stop him, Mother! Look! There, in the ruff and tights! He'll break the window —" her voice went up to a scream. "He's all bronze!"

"Georgina, wake up! Dere is no man 'ere, do you 'ear me?"

Georgy began to sob.

"If he finds Maharanee drinking out of the brandy bottle . . ."

"Oh! *Signor Dio!*" The exasperated woman flounced out of bed and shook her daughter as heartily as if she were three years old again.

"Eh? What? Good Lord, Mother, what *are* we doing?" Georgy gazed round, awake and bewildered.

"What are you doing? Walking in your sleep and talking madness! For goodness' sake, get back to your bed!"

Georgy sat down on the edge of her bed, laughing feebly.

"I had such a dream, Mother, I can't remember what. But Lord, I was frightened."

"You ovaire-tire yourself. You do too moch, I am always telling you. You will not be fit to start wit' Mr. Barlowe next week, you will see!"

"I've not done much to-day," replied Georgy, ready to cry.

"Den you want some physic, do you?" menaced her mother.

Cymbals clashed and drums thudded as the elephants rocked into the ring under a flood of green light, with red nets and gilt tassels on their foreheads and huge fringed carpets swinging from their backs. On Maharanee's neck was perched the laughing German boy, Fritz Ritter, whom Hagenbeck had sent from Hamburg, now painted brown and handling with gravity his harmless wooden goad. To a louder clap of cymbals a palanquin with drawn curtains was carried on by two attendants, from the cushions of which Otto Riegelmann briskly raised himself in cream silk turban and tunic. He handled his whip with authority, while the giant beasts, visionary in the coloured light, knelt on their forelegs, with heads abased before him.

Abruptly a tumult of barking sounded, and two powerful white dogs rushed in, heralding Georgina's entry on the small, mischievous-eyed grey Arab that the adoring Fritz had brought over the water with him. Even Birlingham, to his annoyance, had failed at the dress rehearsal to recognise her in this slim youth with square gold earrings and black eyebrows, whose hair was concealed by the tight-drawn folds of his turban. The ring became a kaleidoscope of shifting colours, as the elephants paraded with upcurled trunks, while Adelma, the mare, paced round them in circles, the white hounds running in and out of her lifted legs. . . .

So the new act proceeded to its final tableau, the Grand Pyramid. Maharanee planted her front feet on a massive red tub; Grete and Katinka heaved up each side with their forelegs on her back, while the dogs scrambled, yapping, up the inclined ridges of their spines and perched upon their heads. Then Georgy rode her mare Adelma close up under Maharanee's immense raised skull and stood for a moment on the peaked Indian saddle. Thence she made one step onto the elephant's uplifted foreleg, a second onto her head, and stood there with outspread arms to crown the pyramid.

Twice at rehearsals Maharanee had swayed her head at this moment, making the loose skin slip. The first time Georgy had fallen forward astride her neck, clutching her ears; but the second time she had been flung clean off. Riegelmann, watching below,

had broken her fall in his arms, and they had both come down flat with the breath knocked out of them. Birlingham angrily handed Georgy that evening a copy of "The Suicide Club." But Maharanee had come at last to understand and stay rocklike. The audience understood too, and clamoured approval. So Barlowe gave a contented nod by the ringside and told himself he had opened well in the old, walled, cathedral city among the Yorkshire Moors.

But it was not of this that he spoke first as Georgy ran back for the last time from the ring and the applause died away. "How is your mother?" he asked her. "Any improvement?"

"Much the same, Mr. Barlowe," she answered. "It's a question of keeping quiet, which she won't, as you know. I must hurry back to see how she's getting on."

"One minute, Georgy," he took her hand in his hard grip. "Fine show to-night; I begin to think you'll get to the top of the tree—though, of course," he added, "you couldn't expect a top salary in London yet."

Georgy thanked him with a rather preoccupied smile; she was thinking about her mother and anxious to start getting her make-up off so as to back quickly to their lodgings. It was during their last week in London that Amalia had first shown alarming symptoms. The rheumatism, except on dank days, had plagued her less since she had given up trying to work, and Georgy had been congratulating herself on her mother's better health. Then one morning, as she lay in bed later than usual after an exceptionally heavy day, she had been startled by a small crash and an exclamation from her mother's adjoining bedroom. She jumped out of bed and hurried in to see what was wrong. Amalia, always an early riser and unwilling to wait for her daughter to make her tea, had dressed as usual, but was now standing clinging to the washstand with a queer expression. She had upset and broken a small soapdish, which was the noise that had roused Georgy.

"What's the matter, Mother?" she cried. Amalia, with her eyes half-shut, made a groping circular movement with her hand.

"Georgy," she gasped, "I am giddy . . . De room is going round! . . . Stop it!"

Her daughter seized her and led her back to the bed. She lay

down for a moment and then with a cry complained that her head was worse. Georgy lifted her in her arms and propped her on her pillows, reinforced by those from her own bed. Then she went out and telephoned for a doctor.

"Let's sit down," he said to Georgy, taking her into the sitting room after examining her mother, "and talk this over. This morning's attack is blood pressure. It's not too serious, though at her age it's always a little anxious. I'm giving her some medicine and you must see that she keeps absolutely quiet for the present. But that's not quite all. You told me she suffered greatly from rheumatics in past years. Did she ever have rheumatic fever?"

Georgy shook her head.

"Well, whatever it is, her heart isn't what it should be, and that's a thing to be even more careful about than the other."

"You think there's danger, Doctor?"

"A heart like hers is always dangerous at her time of life. You see, I'm telling you quite frankly. She simply mustn't take any chances — no running about; avoid stairs; see, when she is able to get up, that she gets out of bed very slowly. Any sudden strain's a thing to be really afraid of. On the other hand, if she's careful, she may live for many years yet. It's impossible to foretell."

"You know we ought to start on Sunday for St. Albans, the beginning of our tour. Can she travel?"

"Must you go? I suppose you must. You're Miss Dufay of the Circus, aren't you?" he smiled. "I thought so; my children and I saw you at the Coburg Palace." He reflected, tapping his spectacle case on his nail. "Honestly, I'd rather she didn't travel so soon. But I realise you have no choice. You couldn't leave her behind with any one? No. I suppose that would frighten her and might make things worse. Well, I don't think I'm justified in actually forbidding the move, but take the greatest care. No hurry, mind! No unnecessary walking and avoid stairs whenever you can."

From that morning Georgy had had the added strain of watching at every spare moment an invalid who, though the blood pressure decreased satisfactorily with the medicine that had been given her, persisted in trying to do all the things the doctor had warned her daughter that she must avoid. Georgy's increased

earnings since she had joined Riegelmann made it possible for them to live now in more comfortable and convenient lodgings; but not all landladies were complaisant with an invalid or ready to relieve Georgy of any of her anxieties by helping to look after her mother when she had to be at the circus. Now, therefore, she hailed a taxicab to carry her more swiftly back past the Minster towers to the little eighteenth-century house, standing in a tree-lined street closed by a mediæval arch, where they were lodged this week. She let herself in and ran upstairs to the cream-panelled bedroom. All seemed well. A candle burned by the bed, and Amalia, propped as usual high on pillows, with her spectacles on her gaunt nose, was telling her rosary (a practice to which she had returned since her illness) with moving lips.

"All well, Mother?" asked Georgy. "Did they bring you your ovaltine?"

Amalia nodded; then slowly removed her spectacles and sighed. "Not'ing 'as happened," she said, "not'ing since you left."

"It's dull for you, I know. Shall I see about the supper now?"

"No, wait a minute. Come and sit down by me 'ere. I want to 'ave a little talk, Georgina."

Georgy threw her hat aside and sat down in the chintz-covered armchair beside the bed. "Well, what is it?" she asked.

Amalia let the black wooden beads of her rosary trickle through her emaciated fingers several times before speaking. Then she said, "You know, Georgette, I shall not be wit' you vairy long now."

Georgy laid an encouraging hand on her mother's. "Don't let in such thoughts, Mother; they're not true. You know that so long as you take care of yourself, you are in no danger. The doctor was quite clear about that. Of course, if you do things like you did at Leeds, running upstairs for your umbrella, you may make yourself really ill. But you won't again, will you?"

The old woman shook her head. "Not'ing mattaire," she said, "I shall go at my time, and soon now. What 'as been written 'as been written." She sighed again deeply and a bright tear hung for a moment on her lashes. "But I would 'ave liked to 'ave seen 'im once more before I go."

"Dad?"



"No. 'Im! Luigi . . . Mr. Imperiali. 'E nevaire understood." Georgy was silent. It was not hers to rebuke or to approve.

"You cannot unnek, Georgy, the misteks you do when you are young."

"Then don't let them trouble you now, Mother," said Georgina gently.

"But I am glad dat I leave you, at any rate, provided for. I 'ave taught you and found you your living."

"You know how grateful I am," said Georgy, bending over and kissing her forehead.

"Only after I shall go, eet will not be so easy for you. You are alone, no brot'er or sister to be wit' you. You 'ave not even any girl friend you could lodge wit'." It was true; not through unfriendliness, but through stress of work, the exacting care of her mother and a taste for male comradeship, Georgy had made no special ties with any of the women of the circus.

"When I have to, and it won't be for a long while yet, I'll fix up for a companion somehow."

"But why not fix up now? Georgy, why don't you marry Otto?"

Georgy fenced. "Nobody asked me, sir, she said."

Amalia made an irritated movement. "You know vairy well 'e would ask you to-day, if you were not always barring de shut-taires against 'im. It rests wit' de woman, you know. When you want, 'e will come. You 'ave only to make de tiniest sign," she held up her little finger, crooked.

"But, suppose I don't want, Mother?"

"Why not? Don't you like Otto?"

"Immensely. We're the best of pals. He's always good-tempered, or nearly always; he's certainly always amusing. He's got brains and doesn't need to talk cards or circus shop all day long, like most of our fellows. It's an escape from the grind to listen to him, just as it is to listen to Frank Birlingham, though I can't understand half the time what *he's* driving at. I could wish Otto was a little less lazy — for a partner, you know — but then he's chock-full of ideas for the business. In short, I admire him and I'm fond of him — but that isn't to say I'm ready to marry him."

Amalia had grunted approbation at every term of praise, but was disconcerted at the conclusion. "But why not den? Is it dat

you are afraid because 'e is, I will say it, a little too fond of lifting de ilbow?"

Georgy turned her head sharply. "I thought he had stopped that since we became partners. Have you seen him tippy or heard anything?"

Amalia looked embarrassed. "You see, Georgette, you must not expect too much of any man. All 'ave d'eir faults. When I was young, like you, I would not 'ave any dat was not quite, quite perfect. I 'ave been since vairy sorry for dat mistake, for when de time came I 'ad to be content wit' . . . well, I will not complain."

Georgy stretched her long limbs, smiling. "I don't think a second-class marriage is very tempting, Mother. I prefer to be as I am. I'm quite happy, or should be if you were well again."

Amalia shook her head dismally. "You are a vairy strenge girl and I do not undairstand you. Eet is de English in you. You seem to 'ave no needs of dis kind. Yet you are always about wit' de men, laughing and talking and playing — eet is not respectable really — but not'ing comes. I do not undairstand. You do not flirt."

"God forbid!" said Georgy, rising. "If I talk to men a lot — perhaps I do, now you mention it — it's about more interesting things, to me at any rate, than love-making."

"I know! I know! You say you are tired talking de shop. But what do you talk always to dat Birlingham fool, to all de riders, to poor Mr. Barlowe, but acts, new acts, beeg, beeg acts. Bah!"

Georgy laughed good-naturedly. "It is my profession, after all. But if you want my views on marriage, Mother, they are that if it happens it ought to be the biggest — and the boldest — act of all. If I can't feel that about it, I'll keep right out of it. Now it's late; I must get the supper."

Amalia turned over sulkily on the pillow and closed her eyes. Georgy passed through the folding doors into the sitting room with its deep window seats and yellow shutters. She lit a cigarette as she warmed the cocoa and prepared Amalia's tray. In spite of her confident tone, her mother's urgency had shaken her a little. Seriously, she applied her mind to the picture of Otto as a possible mate. It was not a repulsive one at all; she frankly owned it was rather attractive. Only, something was missing; she could not tell what, — moonshine, perhaps, or talkie stuff?

Amalia watched from the bedroom her shadow thrown on the ceiling from the lamp on the round oak table in the middle. "Georgy," she cried through the doors, "do not smok'! You 'air smells always of tobacco and no 'usban' will like *dat*."

3

This conversation took place on the Monday. The next two days Amalia was very quiet. She rose only for an hour or two in the middle of each day, to sit in her dressing gown in the armchair. She seemed to spend nearly all her time over her rosary and an old "Garden of the Soul" she had disinterred from her trunk. At noon on Wednesday, just before she left for the circus, a thought struck Georgy. "Mother," she said, "I don't think you're any worse, you know, though you do seem tired this week; but would you like me to find a Catholic priest? You used to go to confession, didn't you? Would it make you happier to see a priest again?"

Amalia gave a quick shudder and her fingers shot out in the horn that averts the Evil Eye from the Italian peasantry.

"A priest, Georgina?" she cried. "'Ow could you r'ink of it? A *soutane* in de 'ouse, but eet is deadly unlucky. Eet would kill me. No, no, I am not so bad yet."

"Of course you're not," said her daughter, reassuring her with a kiss. "And there's no need at all to have a priest, as you don't want one. We won't mention it again. Good-bye, Mother; I can't get back before eleven, but I think that girl Minnie will make your tea nicely after the tip I gave her."

At the circus it proved an exceptionally trying day. After the first house, Knight, who had made a little slip on a wet patch as he entered the ring, showed to his mistress' attentive eyes signs of a very slight strain in his weak hock, and she was energetically employed treating it with rubbing and cold bathing to prevent it growing worse before the evening performance. In the middle of this, Barlowe called her away for a preliminary rehearsal he was holding of a Durbar procession in which the elephants were to figure as the centre of the spectacle; Otto was not to be found, and the manager's ill temper showed itself in an apparent resolve to

tire out the whole company before the evening show. When that came round, Patrico twice knocked down the bar at the high jump, and the entry of the elephants was nearly late because Otto did not plunge through the grooms till just as the band struck up the introduction to the act. He was breathing heavily, Georgy noticed, badly made up, and once or twice wandered into the wrong part of the ring, holding up the act until she or Fritz could prompt him. Barlowe looked at him with an angry eye as he walked erratically out of the arena, grazing the barrier.

Georgy therefore was wearied out when she reached home. Her mother had already fallen asleep and she did not care to waken her. She herself slept later than usual the next morning and when she woke in her small room across the passage was struck by an unusual silence. Amalia did not ever nowadays rise before her daughter came in to see her, but she was a fidgety person, given to coughing, sighing, creaking her mattress, clinking small objects by the bedside and sometimes humming. Now Georgy was struck by the complete silence from her room; even when asleep Amalia usually made her presence known by heavy breathing and little gasps through the doors, which were left always ajar.

In sudden fear Georgy sprang out of bed and ran on bare feet into her mother's room by the door that entered it from the passage. Then she stopped short with dilated eyes and a great sobbing breath. The flowered curtains of the window had been pulled back and the lower pane half-opened. The summer-morning sunshine flooded into the room from a blue sky, and the old whitewashed orchard beneath the window was filled with bird song. In the window seat sat her mother, her head leaning against the folded shutters, her hands fallen on to her lap as though she had laid them there to rest. Her daughter — who knew at the first glance that she was dead — killed by her obstinacy in rising unassisted and straining to open the window — felt daunted by the severe majesty of the lined face, the invincible grace of the tall figure, sitting queenlike as some Pharaoh's consort within her pyramid, even in the unpremeditated fall of death.

So she stood for a second or two staring; then a cry of "Mother!" broke from her and she bounded across the room. At the same moment the landlady thrust her prim face round the doorway

and asked severely, "Is anything wrong, Miss? You shouting like that?" Then she saw the dead woman and screamed.

"Stop that!" cried Georgy, turning to her. "Help me to lift her, quick."

"I couldn't touch it," shrieked the woman, recoiling. "What a thing to happen in my house! Oh, why did you ever come here?" Georgy pushed her out of the doorway and ran downstairs to the telephone.

Her first care after the doctor had been and certified the cause of death (he saw no grounds for an inquest) was to send a note by the hand of the tearful little maid to Frank Birlingham. He arrived swiftly, and in a few moments, with the authority of a son of the cathedral close, had quelled the landlady into shame-faced piety. Then, with an unemotional calm for which Georgy was profoundly grateful, he set about making all arrangements. Several of the women from the circus found time to steal in during the morning hours and offer condolences of the most honest simplicity. "She doesn't cry, poor thing," said one of them to a friend, as she closed the front door softly behind him, "and that makes it much harder for her, you know."

At about one Barlowe himself stepped out of a taxicab at the door with a worried face. The landlady, as an act of virtue, showed him into her private parlour downstairs, and there Georgy came to see him. "My dear," he said, taking her hand into his two great knotted ones, "what a tragedy! A great artist, Georgy; yes, and a good woman. I feel for you just as if you were a daughter of my own, honestly I do." He sat down and enquired some particulars about the end; after which there was an awkward silence. Then Barlowe, spinning his hard hat round on his knee, asked, "What about arrangements, my dear?"

"Which arrangements?" said Georgy.

He cleared his throat. "Well, it's like this. I'm as sorry as any man alive for your terrible loss, but, after all, Georgy, I've got to carry on, haven't I, and frankly I can't do without you — for long."

"Oh! That." Georgy rose listlessly and stared out of the window. "Of course, I understood that. Frank's going round now, making enquiries. He's sure he can arrange the funeral for Saturday —"

"Morning?" put in Barlowe.

"Oh, I daresay. Mother being a Catholic may make some difficulties; but if she's buried on Saturday, I shall be working on Monday — as usual."

"I feel a bit of a brute. But it's the only way."

"You don't want me to-day, I suppose?"

"Of course not!"

"Then I'll come to-morrow; after all, I can do no good sitting here. She would have understood."

"You're a good girl, always were! After all, Patrico's the hit of the first part each night, and your pard. can't carry through straight with the elephant act without you — more shame to him. So you see I'm boxed up if you stay out long. See here, Georgy, if the funeral's Saturday morning, I'd like, as a sign of honour — so would all my people — to make it a proper parade. The band'll be only too glad to play *Saul*!"

Georgy wheeled from the window. "Oh, no, please, please, don't do anything of the sort . . . Yes, Mr. Barlowe, I know it's meant kindly . . . I appreciate it. But the poor thing, she died so beautifully quietly after all she's been through; leave her in peace. Every one of our people who likes to follow the coffin on foot from respect for her or kindness to me, I'll be only too proud to see. But no procession, no band, you understand?"

"I can't say I do," said Barlowe, rising disappointed, "but after all, I didn't come to worry you, my dear, so let it be your way. I'll walk, so will all the others, if I know 'em."

Not till the afternoon and evening had carried off all her acquaintances to their work did Georgy feel the full impact of her loneliness. The landlady in black had vanished, sniffing, after depositing a large Bible with an India-rubber band round it on the table with the supper tray. Georgy sat in the front room while the evening mist fell and the thrushes warbled with heart-melting beauty. As they trilled, something in her broke up, and the large tears began to make glistening films over her eyes, to break and roll down. How strange her relations with her mother had been, she thought. Neither petting on one side nor demonstrations of affection on the other. They had hardly ever called each other "dear"; their kisses had been duty ones of good-morning and



good-night, except sometimes in these last few days. Yet a close comradeship had sprung up between them in the crowded eighteen months since her father's disappearance; they had become necessary to each other, at any rate Amalia had to her daughter. Georgy would never have dreamed the gulf there lay between her mother's faint and intermittent sympathy with her toils, the rare word of praise, the rough-and-ready attention, when well, to her daughter's comforts, and this blank emptiness. And abruptly she realised that she would never be able to bear such loneliness. It was a shadowy crouching beast that she feared, she who feared neither distraught nor savage horse, bellowing elephant nor snarling lion. Yes, she was afraid. The room darkened and the tracery of branches fell upon the floor with a malicious whisper. Suppose the dead woman in the next room should stalk in through the folding doors in her cerements? Georgina's skin pricked as she listened with straining ears. Then she sprang up with a terrified cry. There was a tapping behind her.

"May I come in?" said a gentle voice. She turned with an uncontrollable laugh of relief to the door from the passage. Initiated obsequiously by the landlady with a lamp, Riegelmann appeared in the entrance, dressed in black spats, black tail coat, black tie piled and folded elaborately with a plain gold pin, a shining inch only of silk showing above the mourning swathings of his top hat.

"Oh, Otto," she murmured, leaning back against the table and trying to smother her hysterics behind her handkerchief. "Oh, Otto, it was you? Oh, what a joke. . . . Otto! . . . you are absurd!"

4

Amalia Dufay was buried on the Saturday morning in a small cemetery beyond the city walls. The grave lay just beyond a belt of fir trees, where a low stone wall opened up a view of the plain round the city, with the faint, purple wave of moorland at its rim. It was a severe prospect, even in the August sunshine, but it seemed to Georgina in its ruggedness and forlornness a fitting resting place for her mother. Hither had she come from her birth-

place among the soft Tuscan hills; here found her austere, unbeloved bourne after the long miles of journeying from Moscow to Odessa, from Budapesth to Constantinople, from Tours to Messina, from Tangier to Paris, from New York to London, from London to Dublin, up and down the length and breadth of England again and again, and at the end these two last marches north after the bitter defeat of the Coburg Palace. Here, where a brisk wind seemed always to sing through the stiff firs, the plain white stone would rise after the allotted months, the stone her daughter might not see for years. Slowly it would darken and hollow out, and be encircled by weeds, like the tombs of the northern peasantry that leant over towards each other around it, with their fresh or dim lettering carrying back family traditions for a hundred, two hundred or even three hundred years. A few travellers, perhaps, lingering amid the beauty of this wind-swept sleeping place, would have the curiosity to stoop and read the inscription: "AMALIA DUFAY, Rider. Born at Tortona, Italy," with the dates of birth and death, the letters R.I.P., and the verse, *Nam et si embulavero in medio umbrae mortis, non timebo mala, quoniam tu mecum es*. The text had been suggested by the little priest who in black cope was now completing the last rites with holy water and incense, while the circus people thronged round at a reverent distance. The coffin had been generously loaded with flowers; although Barlowe and the chief members of the company had clubbed together for a large wreath, there had been also many small offerings which had amazed Georgy as proof of a popularity she had not suspected. Otto had in addition offered an immense anchor of white and purple flowers. At length the last prayers were said; the earth thrown with a sound that carried far in the keen, still air, upon the coffin; and the priest with his assistant retired, while the throng began to break up and the sextons set to their work of filling in the grave.

Then Georgy turned round and her eye searched the mourners. It was curious how she had been left alone, a black figure on the raw, yellow edge of the grave, while the priest completed his office. She had driven behind the hearse in a mourning coach with two women from the circus whom she had asked to go with her; but during the procession to the grave-side they had instinctively

fallen back, and no one seemed to feel intimacy enough with her to approach and take their place.

Now she seemed to be looking for a friend, and promptly Otto Riegelmann stepped out of the crowd and came to her side. She spoke a few words to him in a low tone, and those nearest saw his eyebrows go up with a disconcerted look. She laid a hand for a moment on his sleeve and what she said seemed to clear away his annoyance; he nodded and turned back towards the crowd which was breaking up and streaming back along different paths to the entrance. The German caught up quickly with Birlingham and took him by the arm. He whispered a word or two and Birlingham went towards Georgina. Otto for a moment stood watching them together; with rather a peevish expression saw them pass away from the grave along the edge of the fir trees; and then, shrugging, followed the rest of the mourners.

Georgina led Birlingham round the edge of the clump and paused by the rude, grey wall with tufts of wild flowers blowing from its crevices, to gaze out towards the distant ghost of moorland.

"Frank," she said, "this is the first quiet moment I've had to thank you for all you've done, arranging this — and the rest."

He cut her short. "It was nothing, Georgy; you know that. Good lord, I don't want thanks —"

"As between pals," she smiled a little sadly, "I understand, Frank. But there's all the more need for me to tell you something at once that you ought to know. It's going to make no difference to our friendship, though you may blame me for it; I mean for being in what looks like an indecent hurry. But one can't always choose one's time for deciding things, can one?"

He looked at her, a little puzzled.

She gazed out again over the plain where the summer blue turned sullen in the distance; then turning to her companion said abruptly, "I'm going to marry Otto."

"What, at once?" He seemed shaken out of his self-possession.

"Not quite," she answered. "Let me explain. The poor thing there wanted this marriage to happen tremendously. She was pressing me about it in the last real talk we had together two days before she died. I believe she would have died more happily if I

could have told her it was settled." A tear glittered on her cheek and fell down. "I wish I had now; I feel I was hard."

"You mustn't blame yourself," said the clown gently. "We all have those self-reproaches after some one dear has died."

"Well, Frank, it is the sensible thing — isn't it? Otto and I are partners; we could hardly go on together now without it. I know he has wanted it for months and I get on with him very well. I think I understand him and he does want some one to look after him," she pleaded, knowing how much the clown disliked the German. "Apart from all the questions that might be asked and all the difficulties you can easily imagine if I tried to carry on absolutely on my own, I simply couldn't stand the loneliness. I knew that the very first night after her death."

Birlingham turned on her. "Georgy, you must just let me say this. That loneliness, it wouldn't last. That *only*, if there's no more behind it, is a dangerous thing to take such a momentous decision on. It's a bad reason for marriage, Georgy."

"Oh, of course, that's not all. As I've told you, Otto's become a part of my life. If I'd refused he'd have gone away soon, and honestly I couldn't face the hole it would make in my life. I should be wondering what I was for."

"Your career, Georgy!"

"That's not enough, Frank — I know it now — when you're quite alone."

"Wasn't he hurrying rather to press you just after your mother's death? It gave you no time to look round."

"He meant that kindly. He saw and told me I couldn't hold out alone. I think in the circumstances people will understand. Of course, we shall have an absolutely private marriage, I don't quite know when, after this tour perhaps, and then things will be regular again. I can start fresh, without looking back, and stick to my work. *She* would have understood. To carry out her wishes as quickly as possible seems the only thing now I can do for her. But does it seem to you hard-hearted not to wait longer?"

"Nobody who knows you could think such things for a minute! And from the common-sense standpoint I can see all the advantages. It's wise for you to marry into the circus; all your people have and so should you. The only thing I care about and want to

know is this: Have you *chosen* him, really? Does he meet your needs? If not, well, damn all marriages of convenience, I say."

She reflected a moment. "You know, Frank, I'm not so romantic as you. Yes, you are, although you're a clown. I'm a very plain person. I don't believe in expecting too much of marriage." She broke off. "I hate champagne. It fizzes and that's an end of it. And if you have too much, what a fool you must feel afterwards. Life's mostly plain stuff and I want what will wear. A good friend whom you understand, a decent-tempered man with whom you've got work to do in common — a man in this case who'll probably be the better for having some one to steady him — that seems to me good enough for a circus girl. Why miss the solid thing for a dream?"

There was a long silence. Birlingham stood with his face turned away from her, and for a moment she wondered, with a little sinking of her heart, whether she had dealt him a deeper stab than she had realised by her news. But when he turned back she swiftly divined that his perturbation had been entirely on her account. "George," he said, "this is a decision for you, for it's your own life you're wagering. If you're satisfied, it would only be the greatest impertinence in me or any one else to offer to advise you. Now, is this marriage absolutely fixed and settled?"

"I've given my promise."

"Without misgivings?"

"I see clearly all round that it's what I ought to do, and that fancies would probably only lead me into a mistake that might ruin my life, perhaps ruin Otto's."

Birlingham swung round, holding out his hand. "Then that's clear. My dear," his grotesque face was transfigured again with that light of tenderness she had seen there only once before, when he was telling her about Ruth. "I wish you all the happiness in the world, because you deserve it all. As for Otto, you won't expect me to say the lucky dog deserves what he's got; honestly I don't know who could. But it's the very best thing that could happen for him. Just as this turning point, it ought to make all the difference to him. If he can't be worthy of such a wife — but he will, he must be."

"Frank, you're the best man in the world —"

"Rubbish. Of course I understand this ends a chapter — only a chapter though — in our friendship. You've got some one with the right to take care of you now — I'm afraid he must have felt he ought to have taken you back this morning. But it was good of you to explain to me, and *inside*, you know, there's nothing altered between us. Let me go and look for a taxi."

He hurried away down the path, while she remained still staring at the faintly traced peaks. Strange that she felt the loneliness again, now that he had left her. She thought she had got rid of that, at least. It must be nerves; after all, she had been strained. She wished she could go up into the moors over yonder to get refreshment; they were to work round there for some weeks before pitching at Skippom for the Races; perhaps they would be near enough for a walk up to the top at their next stopping place. Not with Otto, though; he didn't love climbing. Well, he was no worse for that.



## CHAPTER SIX

### I

THE rain that had fallen all through the afternoon had stopped at last, and the setting sun blazed out on the circus encampment. The white canvas gleamed against the dun sweeps of the moor; the pennons of the roundabouts and the decorated fronts of the booths flamed in full colour; the drenched strip of linen between two poles at the entry, which bore the announcement BARLOWE'S ROYAL CIRCUS, became for a moment a dazzling transparency.

Circus and Fair lay to the left of the straight road that, from the top of the winding hill where Skippom ends in villas and grey cottages, runs forward to meet the loftier moorlands ahead. Down in the valley, choked by waves of crimson brick, the slate roofs shone with the wet; while opposite, behind a great purple shoulder, the sun hung crushed and dissolved into opaline meres. Feet scrunched on the sodden road, as the last of the afternoon crowd drifting away and the first few early comers for the evening sent a noise of talking and laughter through the pure air. Then a firm step ground the cinders by the entrance, and Barlowe addressed a police-sergeant caped in waterproof.

"I hope you've brought plenty of men with you, Sergeant," he said; "we may have some stiff rowdies up here this week."

The sergeant turned a superior eye on him. "Ah think yo' can leave it to us, Mr. Barlowe, to ma'ake all necessary arrangements. Ah've not been twenty years on the division in Skippom without learning how to handle our folk."

"We know that well enough, Sergeant Mowbray," answered Barlowe, dipping a hand in his pocket. Silver chinked, passing,

and the officer broadened into a smile. "Yo' can leave it to me," he assured the proprietor. "Ah've four stout tykes oop here that'll worry any rough for you."

"Four only?" said Barlowe, frowning again. "I suppose you know the Vascelli gang's at the Races?"

"And likely to stop there," replied the Sergeant. "Ta'ake it from me, Al Vascelli's not going to climb all the way oop here onto the moor to ma'ake trouble for you — and for himself."

"Yet I had to chuck one fellow out already this afternoon for interrupting the show."

"So Ah was told. Yo' didn't need to, did yo'?"

"Well, he was throwing lighted matches at the elephants and halfpence at the lady performers. By God, I think I did need to!"

"High spirits," said the Sergeant, spitting into the mud, "and ma'aybe a spot of bad whisky. What can yo' expect in Ra'ace week?"

"But that's just it," said the circus owner earnestly, tapping one of the policeman's breast buttons. "If it had been whisky, I wouldn't a' worried so much. But the beggar was sober enough. It looked to me more like the start of a frame-up."

"Leave it all to us," repeated Sergeant Mowbray, shaking the last drops of rain from his oilskin. "The police are the proper persons to deal with insolting behaviour. Your circus-cha'aps only ma'ake things worse by interferin'."

"All the same," muttered Barlowe, as he turned away, "I'll see to it that my fellows stand by at every show, each of 'em with a good thick stick."

The dusk was already falling, grey veil upon veil. A mist had crept from the river to fill the hollows below, where the lights of the town, increasing moment by moment, sent a surge of bright pin-points twinkling across the gulf. Above, the last traces of day lingered in paler blue at the base of the deepening night behind the moors. A single white star trembled and disappeared, then shone again at the peak of the high shoulder. As Barlowe passed up the flimsy street of tents, swings and sideshows, lights were beginning to beam and fizzle, and thin jets of steam to shoot up from the roundabouts, whose clusters of coloured bulbs flashed on and off, to the clinking of small repairs. A few visitors strayed

about the deserted paths, but it was the lull between two phases of vigour. Dinners were being cooked and men stood about with cigarettes glowing red in the shadows.

Barlowe paused as a tall figure stripped to the vest came out of a tent with towel and bucket.

"Frank," he said, "aren't *you* a bit of a boxer?"

Birlingham grinned. "I've been knocked out for love by most of the big amateur pots in my time."

"Well, you may want all the science you've got before we pull clear of Skippom on Sunday."

Birlingham set down the bucket. "What's in the wind then, Guv'nor?" he asked. "Do you expect a rough-house?"

"You know the Vascelli racing gang's in the town?"

"Seems so; but if any of those macaroni tamers are *muching mal-lecho*, won't they save up steam to blow off on Saturday night?"

"They would, I agree, if it were just rowdyism. But if somebody wanted to queer our pitch for us, they'd get busy as quick as they could, wouldn't they?"

Birlingham fumbled for a crushed packet of de Reszkes in his trouser pocket. "This grows thrill," he murmured, striking a match. "Who are we up against, Guv'nor?"

"That's what I wish I knew, my boy. Have you noticed that queer show down by the old bridge on the Racecourse side?"

"The Temple of Illusion?"

"Yes. What did you make of it?"

"Couldn't get in; it wasn't open. But I rumble some sort of wax-work."

"Why should they pitch all alone by themselves down there, instead of coming up to join the Fair? I may tell you, I put the point to the Frenchman who seems to be bossing them. 'Surely, it's better for both of us,' I told him, 'not to divide the crowd. Shows pass on clients when they're shoulder to shoulder.'"

"What quoth he to that?"

"Flatly refused. Said he had his orders and couldn't budge. He wasn't the owner, and he had to do what he had been told by Mossoo le Directeur. 'Well,' I says, 'perhaps I can have a word with Mossoo le Directeur. He may see different when I've talked to him. Who is he?' Parly-voo wouldn't help me there either. Said

it was a confidential matter. So I lost my temper and came away. But that's not all, Birlingham, nor the worst." He plunged a fist into his jacket pocket, and brought out a crumpled pink leaflet. "Just you look at that bill. I found a youth distributing them at the top of the hill when I came back from the town."

Birlingham cocked the leaflet up under the rays of a flare and read:

#### CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Englishmen, don't patronize shows of performing beasts! Every circus is a prison of tortures for our dumb brothers. If you don't go to see them, this evil trade will die out. Keep your shillings for clean entertainments —

The clown broke off. "But this is sheer poppycock. Nothing cruel goes on in your show. You wouldn't stand for it!"

"I never have. I'm on the best of terms with the S.P.C.A., inspectors: they're free to look over my waggons day *or* night. But this rag isn't put about by the S.P.C.A."

"Who then?"

"The boy wouldn't say who had hired him. So I asked him if he would take five pounds for his whole stock. He fell to that, and it was worth the money to me. But now, if you add to all this that a man did his best to start a riot during the show this afternoon, you'll see why I'm bothered, Birlingham. I've not a real enemy that I know of in the whole show world. Who is it, then, who's getting his knife into me?"

It was quite dark by now; the acetylene flares and glittering electric globes of the fairground made a blaze that quenched the timid stars; fields and moors had shrunk into a cloak of blackness. The throng was thickening fast along the miry alleys, while the road outside was noisy with footfalls and cars. Evidently a good part of the immense crowd that every year flooded the little moorland town for its race week, cramming hotels and lodging houses or camping on the flats round the course, was determined, in spite of rival appeals, to take advantage of the break in the weather and visit the Fair and Circus.

The steam calliopes thundered from the roundabouts, as they ponderously whirled their gilt tops and flashing mirrors. Oil paint-

ings of lion and tiger hunts ran round the canopies; and beneath, where the organs pealed amid wreaths of electrics, small mechanical soldiers and ballet girls nodded and jiggled. Upheld by the twisted brass columns that pierced their saddles, the horses, with rolling eyeballs and crimson nostrils, bore riders in every variety of poise. The children solemnly clutched the supporting uprights or were clasped by anxious mothers perched on the croups; the school-boys swung recklessly, facing their horses' tails; and, while saturnine swains lolled sidesaddle with humped shoulders, their laughing maidens, short-skirted and Russian-booted, rode astride with knees bent to grip the painted flanks, the flying curls under their berets whipping their cheeks.

In a torrent broken by the booming of gongs and clangour of handbells, the showmen bellowed before the freak exhibitions, the cock-shys, the pavilions of the palmists, the houp-la tables glittering with clocks and cheap china. A searchlight swept the crowd from a wooden tower, down the sides of which, following a spiral slide, fun-seekers tobogganned jerkily on mats. Screams and laughter resounded from the Whirling Waves and the other thrill rides; the aerial chairs, with their shrieking freight, spun dangerously over the rippling heads of the onlookers; a soldier in khaki and a red-hatted girl bobbed up and down rhythmically over the ridge of a tent, as the swing boat to which they clung pitched to and fro. Cracks came from the metallic green jungles of the shooting galleries; thuds and bell notes from the weight-and-hammer apparatus; while a throb of African drums made a sombre undertone from behind the mysterious stockade of a "Native Village," where a showman in white pith helmet waved a pointer.

Inside the dressing tent of the circus the uproar was heard as a seething murmur only. As Georgina Dufay, alone at the moment in the women's compartment, turned from her tiny looking glass propped on a hamper to take her riding coat from the pole where it hung, the canvas flap of the doorway was pushed up, and Myra, the snake charmer, black-haired and Jewish-looking, with cheeks rouged and eyes enlarged by penciling, entered from the ring with her Eastern draperies fluttering. Carrying her hands on her wide hips, she walked boldly up to the slim girl in white cord breeches and white shirt, and challenged her.

"Look here, Georgy, you and me had better have it out. I'm not going to be accused of filthy things, I can tell you. Why couldn't you wait to let me explain?"

"You only make things worse by explaining, Myra."

"I don't want to take your man, if you'd only be sensible. If you weren't so stuck-up, you'd see it was only a bit of fun."

"Queer fun for me, Myra, to come into our rooms and find you sitting on Otto's knee and kissing him."

"It's a lie, we never kissed ——"

"I heard you."

"Well, what if we did? You know, he was jolly."

"His being drunk makes it no better."

"Well, Lord-bless-us, a man does need some amusement in his life. If you sat on his knee a bit more, he wouldn't want to try his nonsense on me; for that's all it is, nonsense. Look here! We're pals; can't we patch it up? I'll stop his silliness another time, I swear I will. I hate poaching, honest I do, with a decent girl like you."

"You needn't bother. And there's no poaching, as you call it, Myra. I spoke to Otto as soon as you had gone ——"

"Breaking it all off? Oh! You are a little fool. Whatever for, I'd like you to tell me? He doesn't want to side-step, I know it for a fact."

Georgy was silent. Myra shrugged her opulent shoulders. "If you go cutting your nose off to spite your face, it isn't fair to blame it on me, now is it?"

"I don't blame either of you, if you want to know, my dear girl. It's best as it is. I'm well out of a bad bargain and no doubt he feels the same."

"Yes, but it means you're pushed out of Riegelmann's Elephants."

"What nonsense! This hasn't anything to do with business!"

"And you think he'll keep you for partner after this?" Myra softened. "Look here, kid, you don't seem to me to know anything about life. You haven't the least idea how to hold a man. When I came in here to-night, I thought you'd have a handful of my hair out, and I'd have liked you all the better for it. I'm not so crazy as to suppose that Mr. Otto Riegelmann would ever marry



me. Some girls, of course, would think it damn funny to muck up your chances without hoping to make anything partickler for themselves. But I'm not that sort. I'm sorry I shoved in, but I wasn't meaning anything serious, nor was he. Come, you make it up with him, my dear; make a fuss of him, cuddle him, that's what he wants; and I'll set him proper to rights, if he tries any more of the old hanky-panky on me. He'll be mad with me if he thinks I've lost you for him, and I don't want that, neither."

"Myra, you think you're being kind, but I wish you'd take your fingers out of my affairs. After what happened this afternoon, I think it a damned cheek of you."

"Oh! All right. If your ladyship takes it like that!" She serpentine towards the doorway, her shoulders undulating. "I s'pose," she said, turning on the threshold, "this busts it up between us, and you'll be looking for another roommate?"

Georgy turned from the looking glass where she was folding her stock. "If *you* want to make a change, Myra, get on with it. But you needn't on my account. I've told you I'm not going to try to get your bone away from you. If you don't want to share lodgings any more, please yourself."

"Ain't you a cool one!" ejaculated Myra. "You'll never lose your fluff for the sake of a man, will you? Mind, I don't say you're not right; there's few of them worth the trouble they cause us, the swine. But I'm glad to hear you talk like that, Georgy. It suits me well enough, as you know, to go on sharing with you."

"Then that's settled," said Georgy, as some other performers came in; "let's hear no more about it. Are the dogs on yet? What a row there is outside to-night!"

She was not so indifferent as she had tried to make Myra believe. The discovery of that afternoon had been a sickly shock to her. The vigilance with which during her childhood her parents had kept her apart from the coarser aspects of their profession had marked her character; although she had now for a year lived at close quarters with the vile as well as with the heroic elements of the circus world, she had retained the fastidiousness of the convent-bred girl. Her pride, too, had been lashed on the raw by the discovery that within a few weeks of their engagement Otto could be unfaithful to her, and with a trollop like Myra. The angry disgust

that had driven her to her swift breach with him still gave her energy to resist the loneliness that had begun to shadow her again so soon as he had gone away with hanging head. But the shadow was deepening as she made her way to the stables. She was almost ready to cry out for sympathy to each of the crowd of performers, grooms and dressers she passed. But on the faces of all now she fancied she read some lascivious leer or harsh calculation. Her heart sank as she reflected on her lot — her mother under the soil of the lonely little Yorkshire graveyard; her father, a fugitive shadow, perhaps in Asia or in Africa; her working partner from now on probably an enemy; her roommate revealed as a deceiver whom she must at once despise and fear, and yet cling to as the only refuge against solitude, the only barrier between her and the ambushes that would beset a girl trying to live without a companion. A sudden agony of doubt rent her. Had she been a little fool to break off with Otto without giving him a chance of explanation? Ought she to make it up again? Could she, if she wanted to? Or was she buying with this pain a great deliverance? . . . But here was Knight, rubbing his nose against her sleeve in the twilight of the canvas stall, and his head disappeared from before her blurred eyes, as she slipped in behind him, pressing her face against his warm body.

The tent was packed for the show that night, an excitable and rowdy audience, but not, Barlowe felt, as he watched its humours anxiously from the ringside, inclined for mischief or organized for riot. Georgy's jumping act on Patrico hit the taste of this horsey crowd; hunting cries and the shouting of mock odds blended with the cheers as the bar was raised for the top leap. Georgy smiled, though she was not without fear that so nervous a creature as Patrico might take fright at these unusual noises. But the act went off without a hitch, and by the interval in mid-programme Barlowe was beginning to think that for this night he might lay his arms aside. Yet the evening was not to pass without incident.

It came during the Elephant Act. Georgy and Otto, who had met without speaking at the entry to the ring, were working through it with the smoothness of long practice. They had come to a bit of business in which Maharanee lay down on her side and allowed Adelma, ridden by Georgy, to plant her forefeet on a pad

strapped to the mound of her flank. Adelma had just reared to set her dainty feet in place, when a man sprang up in the front row and flung a firework under the elephant's trunk. Otto, who was seeing that Maharanee kept her head on the ground, jumped back at the explosion; the elephant heaved up convulsively; and Adelma, her feet dislodged from the pad, came down with crossed forelegs in the tan. Only Georgy's tight seat saved them both from a fall and enabled her to pull the mare up from her knees. There had been a commotion round the place whence the firework was flung; Barlowe dashed across the ring and hurled himself over the barrier, but the ruffian dived away down a passage and vanished. Barlowe hurried to find Sergeant Mowbray; but that officer did not arrive for many minutes, and then took long notes before organising his search.

Outside the ring Georgy and her partner examined Maharanee to see if she had been wounded or scorched, but found no marks. Then the German turned to Georgy with a shamed face and muttered, "Chorche, you — you did well. If you had lost your head we might have had a valuable horse injured."

"And a valueless partner," Georgy smiled a little bitterly.

"No, Chorche, I don't mean that at all. You always misunderstand me, these days. It was not so once."

"I'm sorry, partner, but I thought we might as well have it out. After this afternoon, it seems to me, you'll want to find some one else to work with."

His jaw dropped and his eyes shone with the childish dismay she knew so well. "No, Chorche, of course not! What can I do without you? *Himmell* Who understands Maharanee like you? Won't you go on, jost as partner for the present? You know we can make a fresh business, if you want, with terms more fafourable to you."

Georgy felt a weight off her. She was only too ready, if Otto was, to return to the old basis of comradeship. She knew shrewdly enough that if she lost the prestige of association with Riegelmann's Elephants, it would be a long struggle to build up her own reputation without the means of buying really good horses. She went to the dressing tent with a lighter step and Myra was astonished at her cheerfulness during supper.

"Well, you aren't breaking your heart, are you?" she could not help saying. "To look at you, no one would think you had dropped any little article this afternoon."

Georgy flushed, not with resentment, as her roommate thought, but with a sudden self-reproach.

2

"Georgy, I s'pose you wouldn't care to come down to the wax-works after the show this evening?"

"What on earth for, Myra?"

"Ooh! I dunnaow." Myra turned from pulling down her red and green velvet hat and empurpling her curved nose with powder before the bedroom glass, and glanced a little askew at Georgy, who had just arrived by tram from the fairground between the shows. "I'd like some one to go with me, that's all. There's an hour after we're through before the Temple closes."

"But you've seen them once and you said they frightened you."

"They are a bit creepy-crawly; worst I've ever seen, if it comes to that. That's another reason why I'd as soon not go again alone. But go I must; there's a boy in the string quartette ——"

"Oh, God, Myra, have I got to protect you from men, now?"

"Aoh! You needn't turn so nasty, need you? I've left your sheikh alone, since, haven't I?"

"I've no sheikh, Myra."

"Well, all I can say is, you ought to be jolly well pleased if I *have* found another friend. I had something else to tell you, but I don't know whether I shall, now; you do bite any one's nose off, don't you?"

Georgy sank down upon the bed, pulling off her black hat. "Carry on, Corporal," she sighed, "it takes all sorts to make the world, I suppose."

"No, but look here, Georgy, do talk sense. There may be something in this for you. François, that's my boy, says to me, 'Haven't you a little friend that shares rooms with you?' 'Maybe so, maybe not,' I says. 'What's she to you, anyways?' 'To me, *chérie*, nothing at all,' he answers, 'but there is one here who would be glad of a little talk with her, one who knew her father ——'"

"Oh! Myra, this is rot ——"

"No, it's the truth I'm a-telling yer. What should I go to make it up for? 'A friend of her father's,' says he, 'Get her to come with you.' Say, Georgy, did your pa ever know a waxwork proprietor?"

"One? Hundreds!" Georgy sat with her chin on her palm, ruminating. "It's queer, though. Myra, who *is* the owner of this strange set-out that every one's talking about? Did François tell you?"

"Never asked! What's it to me? All I know is, he said a friend of your father's wanted to speak to you."

Georgy slid off the bed. "I'll come," she said, "to find out what it's all about. Meet you outside the dressing tent as soon as I'm changed."

"All right. But get a move on; we sha'n't have more'n about an hour anyhow. The Temple closes down at eleven."

A few minutes after ten the two girls jumped into a tram at the top of the hill and were jolted down into the heart of the old town by the river. They passed a police station with a blue lantern, a Corn Exchange with drab pillars; and got off where the tram stopped on the near side of a stone bridge across the river. Over the bridge the road ran past a crescent of cheap lodging houses, beyond which lay scattered cottages and a church with black windows. Then an old inn, once a posting house, loomed up, still brightly lit and resounding with the shouts of bookies, racing touts and their hangers-on. In a field at the back of this inn, in front of a gaunt barn, stood a marquee lit by flares, with one or two shuttered caravans beside it. Its painted front was like a prison wall, with a red devil peering out of one barred window and a skeleton out of another. Over the doorway hung a large painting of the guillotine in action.

In spite of the late hour, a fair business was still doing, as Myra led the way up the steps. She seemed to be known; for, after she had put her head under the canvas portcullis of the paybox, where a goat-faced youth was issuing checks, she and Georgy were passed in without payment or questions asked. They tailed on to a group of spectators in the dim light and followed along a corridor lined by veiled alcoves. A female attendant in spectral draperies paused before each alcove in turn, and announced, before pulling the curtain, what "illusion" would be disclosed.

In one, called "The Sarcophagus," a withered brown mummy changed slowly into a smiling Princess and faded back again into leering decay. In another, "The Lure," a gilt web held the head of a live girl with no apparent body but a spider's, while male forms were entangled in the meshes below. A third, "The Red Barn," showed a phantom Maria Marten hovering over a waxen William Corder, as he dug by lantern light. In the last, and most gruesome of the set, Burke and Hare, the Resurrection Men, were upheaving from the grave a mouldering coffin, through a rent in which a skull glimmered beneath the moon, and the skull changed to a living face.

Gasps and giggles came from the onlookers, who huddled close to enjoy their terrors; but Georgy, who knew the trick of mirrors by which such "illusions" are produced, lagged on the outskirts of the group, bored and a little disgusted. At the end of the corridor the attendant drew a curtain which masked the entrance to the great barn itself, and led the way into a little curtained-off space, with some ferns and gilt music stands in its centre and three openings, lit by eerie blue glow lamps, out of it. "Left opening," she announced in her listless voice, "the Laughing Mirrors; right opening, Topsy-Turvy Castle; in the centre, the Hall of Executions. Don't miss the Hall of Executions with its lifelike groups, before leaving." The visitors broke into separate parties, some to watch themselves distorted in curved mirrors, others to receive an electric shock in the feet before stumbling into a paint and canvas drawing-room with furniture on its ceiling, a few timidly advancing into the central hall, which was dotted with flickering red lights and reached up sombrely to the blackened rafters of the high-pitched barn-roof. Georgy caught at Myra's sleeve. "Need we go with them?" she whispered. "This is stale stuff, made a bit nastier, as far as I can see. Where's your friend?"

"I'll ask Edie," answered Myra, indicating the female guide. "The quartette plays here until ten, then they go off." She spoke to the woman a moment and came back to Georgy. "Edie says if you'll wait in the Hall of Executions she'll find the gentleman that wants to see you. I'll just go and have a word with François; back again soon, ta-ta."

She disappeared down the corridor they had come along, as



Georgy reluctantly felt her way into the gloom of the central hall. One or two people passed her coming out; and as her eyes grew used to the feeble clusters of red lights round the tableaux she found herself alone with a prison population. To her left a wax figure was being electrocuted; to her right another was being hanged; in front, on a raised scaffold below a loft from which a demon with a pitchfork leaned, a third victim awaited the descent of the guillotine. Too familiar with the show business to undergo the ordinary tremors of the unsophisticated, Georgy yet felt something sinister about these three puppets with their covered faces. Down the middle of the uneven, stone floor, below the scaffold, ran a long dock, from which a row of famous criminals regarded her glassily, as if their breath had just stopped from surprise at her entrance. This stand was flanked by two vizored figures in armour, while before it a masked executioner grasped his axe.

Georgy stood looking about. It was very still; the distant clanking of the turnstile suggested that the last visitors were leaving, and the thick odour of wax mingling with the musty smells of the old barn oppressed her. Once or twice she was on the point of seeking the fresh night air outside; but curiosity kept her to her place, and presently a feeling, for which she jeered at herself, that, the moment she turned to go, the figures to which she offered her back would glide forward and lay blockish hands on her shoulders. The rigidity of the silent watchers grew more and more pregnant; her least movement now, she fancied, would be a signal for a general stir. . . . Angrily she reminded herself that she was a showman's daughter and clenched her hands in her coat-pockets while she mastered her nervousness.

Then a hot thrill ran through her and she leaped a pace backwards. One of the figures in the dock *had* moved. It was straining over the ledge and ogling her. She found herself gazing, with shaking knees, at the high black stock, the slanting smile and the yellow vulturine eyes of Joe Rixen.

"And how are *you*, dear?" he asked, grinning at the success of his trick. "You didn't see me come in from under the loft, did you? I expect you're surprised to find *me* here. But this is *my* show, Georgy — all of it — and you're the only person in Skippom that knows it. It's blood-curdling, isn't it? Good enough for the bump-

kins, anyway; I can show much subtler things to a Paris audience." He skipped lightly out of the dock and came towards her.

Georgy shrank back as he approached. "You're not bearing malice, are you?" he asked. "Just because you and I had a few cross words together last year at that auction? I didn't mean anything I said; you shouldn't have thought I did. I wasn't quite myself that day. You see your dear Dad — oh, I'm not saying a word against the dear old gentleman, so don't start jumping — your dear Dad, the grand old boy, well he'd done just the least bit of a double on me, don't you think? A bit of a knifer, dear old Freddy. Oh! I don't blame him now. In his place," he grinned, "I daresay I'd have done as much. All the same, it made me just the least little bit mad, doncherknow?" He twisted his fingers together with an absent look. "When I say *mad* that's only my way of putting it. You wouldn't say I was *mad* really, would you?" He stopped to look at her closely and suspiciously, and for a moment she fancied a spark of terror in his glance. It faded and he began again. "After all, these little differences can't wipe out old friendships. I was fond of your pore father, oh! very fond, Georgy — as he was of me. When can you remember him giving a show without sending for me? So it was silly of him to bolt like that. What he owed me . . . well, it's lost and it's not the least use crying after gone dollars, is it? I've just forgiven it him, written it all off, so!" He flourished an arm, sending lank, black shadows dancing over the sloping roof of the barn. "Of course, dear old Freddy didn't know that," he went on, "or he'd never have run away from me, would he? But I expect you hear from him now and again, Georgy; it's only natural you should. As between pals, where is he now, eh? eh?"

Georgy swallowed and found a hoarse voice. "I don't know, Mr. Rixen," she answered. "Father never writes."

"You don't expect me to believe *that*, do you?" He took a step nearer and thrust his face close up to hers. She turned faintly from the yellow gleam of his eyes and his menacing rictus. "It's the truth, Mr. Rixen," she gasped.

He skipped back a pace and stood looking at her slyly, stroking his crooked chin. "All right," he said. "I believe you; there never was such a trustful chap." He gave a croaking chuckle.

"And so you've been doing very nicely, Georgy, with your riding, they tell me? I always thought you were a gal with the stuff in you. Pity you went with Barlowe, though. He's a blackguard and I owe him one. Doing his level best — would you believe it? — to queer my pitch here in Skippom. But he'll be sorry for himself soon. I don't take that kind of thing lying down; why should I, tell me? Still, that doesn't mean I wish *you* any harm, Georgy. I expect you're earning good money to-day, eh, eh? Yes, and I bet a nice bit of it goes to the man who never writes at the place you don't know of, eh? All right . . . I won't worry you any more about that. You're a staunch little thing, that's what you are. If I'd had a daughter like you, a handsome gal and talented, I wouldn't have run away from her and left no address. But, Georgy," he sidled nearer again, "didn't he leave any little bits of paper behind that would have helped you to know what was on his mind?" He paused with his predatory beak sharply outlined against one of the red lamps. She was silent. "Won't tell me anything, eh?" he snarled. "You're a damned difficult person to help, aren't you? And me taking all this trouble for you. . . . But there, I mustn't lose my temper! When I do, I get so funny, Georgy, I'm me and somehow not me, and they all say it's so bad for me; Seth and Walter say I mustn't do it. But come now, you don't want to make me ill, do you? — Surely you can tell me this. I expect your father left an old trunk behind, or maybe an old deed box: now did you find a packet of letters, for instance, written on pale-blue foreign note, very thin? They'd look pretty tired with age by now." Georgy shook her head. "No? Nor you didn't find perhaps no little bits of jewellery that you might have sold, maybe? There was a horseshoe tie-pin your father often wore that I used to admire no end. Or," he began with a careless air to shift the position of one of his dummies, while his voice took on an all but imperceptible tenseness, "or you might perhaps have seen a cuff link, or a bit of one, an emerald in the shape of a four-leaved shamrock. Lucky, you know."

"We found nothing at all like that, Mr. Rixen," said Georgy.

"Oh!" He peered at her across his shoulder, fidgeting with the wax figure's neck tie. "But perhaps your father got away with all his stuff like?"

"He took no luggage. He left all his clothes and belongings in a wardrobe; we sold them nearly all."

"Well, one never knows. You can stow a lot about you for a flight, eh?"

Suddenly he thrust his hands into his pockets and came with his jerky stride close up to her again. "Georgy, dear girl, I'm sorry for your pore Dad, as I said; but if I chose to tell all I could, d' you know where he'd find himself? — in quod."

"What a lie!" A rage worthy of her father gave her voice back to her. "Yes, a dirty lie, Joe Rixen. Why do you persecute us like this? You drove Dad out of the country, I know. What was there between you two and what are you after now? You've driven my father desperate, I believe; my mother died of it, and now you can't leave me in peace. Why? What for?" Her lip trembled and deep sobs shook her. "Brute! Coward!" she choked.

"Come! Come!" The pantomimist watched her with a grin of enjoyment. "You *are* losing your wool, aren't you? That's because you know you're in a hole." He stepped back, swinging the loose end of his heavy gold watch chain. "How do you know I wasn't just trying to frighten you a bit? Perhaps so, perhaps not. But you're certainly one of those gals that crying suits. It's the only way to wake your sort up. Now you look a live woman, Georgy, not just a handsome figure, like those stiff 'uns here. I'm *glad* I stirred you up a bit. Why, I feel as if I'd only just got to know you." He suddenly caught her arms in his. "We're going to know one another a lot more — yes, a lot."

"You beast!" sobbed Georgy, struggling. But he only cackled and drew her closer to him. She was conscious, as she wrestled with him, of the silent throng about them, malignant spectators of her peril, and oddly, the strained face of the pantomimist as it loomed nearer and nearer, seemed to have the same sightless stare as the waxworks. She tried to shriek, but no sound came from her lips; then with a wild effort she struck him on the mouth.

The blow seemed to shake him, as if he had not seen it coming. His lips parted with a gasp; the edge of a small, twisted gold ring she wore on her little finger had cut him and a thread of blood trickled into the corner of his mouth. Abruptly he uttered his shrill, cracked laugh.

"Stuck your claws in, did you, by God?" he jeered. "Do it again, you little wild cat! Scratch! Bite! You think it hurts me, do you?" He bent her back, trying with gloating ferocity to bring his bloodstained lips against hers, while she fought him off with her fingers. "I don't care for kisses without pain in them," she heard his stinging whisper — "I'll teach you to play my game one of these days. I'll teach you —"

"Aow! You blackguard!" There came a scream from the dark doorway. Myra had burst into the hall. "Whatever are you doing?" she clamoured, running towards them.

"Get out, you!" snarled Rixen, loosening his hold of Georgy.

"That I won't, then!" cried Myra, embracing her friend. "What's he been doing to you, my dear?"

"Beat it!" whispered Rixen, advancing with crouching steps. "Leave her to me, and get out of here! I'll strangle you, if you come between us."

Myra whirled on him. "Will you, you dirty hound? You take one more step and I'll howl this place down. I've met your sort before; but you ain't in one of your Paris gay-houses, let me tell you. They can 'ear us back in the pub. You move a foot and I'll 'ave all Skippom and the police in before you can wink your yellow eyes. Get that?"

"I'll choke the squawk out of you first, you painted parrakeet!" Rixen rushed forward with a crazy glare, but Myra, with cool presence of mind, plucked the heavy axe from the figure of the headsman and waved it round her head, at the same time squealing, "Perlice!" like a steam whistle.

Rixen checked himself abruptly; his face sobered and his frenzy changed to a sullen cunning. "Get out, the pair of you," he muttered, "making all this hullabaloo and trying to get my show a bad name. Put down my property, you long-nosed sheeny."

"I can sniff vermin like you a mile away with it, anyhow," retorted Myra, throwing down the weapon. "Come along, Georgy, there's a dear: I'm sorry about all this."

"Go along, Georgy, there's a dear!" mimicked Rixen. "But remember what I said. There's the police of two countries would be glad to know what I can tell 'em."

Georgy, as Myra led her from the place, threw a frightened backward look over her shoulder. The little red lamps still glowed in the shadowy depths of the long barn, and still Rixen, with the smear of blood on his face, stood rigid among the rigid forms, watching her gloatingly.

The two girls walked in silence as far as the bridge, Georgy leaning on Myra. There she disengaged herself and leaned over the parapet, deadly sick, her eyes on the water rushing under the arch.

"Try not to take on, Georgy," said her companion placidly. "These things will happen to girls sometimes; best thing's to forget 'em or have a bit of fun out of them. Sometimes I think you ought never to have been in this business at all; you've had too much high education. It don't prepare you for a life like ours. Queer thing you couldn't see yourself what the beast was up to, and down him. You're nearly a foot taller than me, and I should have thought pulling at that piebald brute of yours had given you as much muscle as I've got through choking snakes. Still, one never can tell when one's going to come all-overish, specially with a man."

"I'm all right now," answered Georgy, turning away from the river. "I can't tell you why it is, Myra, because I don't know; but that man has just the same power over me as your big boa constrictor has over the rabbit who lets him swallow him for dinner. If I had all Sandwina's muscle it would be no use — against him."

"Lucky, then, that I came back to look for you!"

"Pluck as well as luck, Myra! You've made up to-night for any unfriendly thing you did earlier this week."

Myra squeezed her arm. "Then just you listen to me, my dear. Try to wash out that unfriendly thing, as you call it, though I never meant it so, as soon as possible. You can see now that big and strong and proud as you are, you need some one to look after you. Otto's dying to come back. Let me give him the office. I'd feel ever so much easier, Georgy, to think I hadn't mucked up you two. Won't you do what I ask, Georgy?"

Georgy said nothing.



Before the morning Myra was sure that Georgy must take her advice — "unless she wants to go potty." Twice after they had gone to bed Georgy made her go downstairs to see that the back as well as the front doors were bolted; and disturbed her again just as she was dropping off to argue that any one could get through the window by climbing from the roof of a shed in the yard. In the middle of the night Myra woke to hear her screaming in dreams, and in the grey of the dawn found her stumbling round and round the room, moaning, still asleep. "You and me'll have to part, my dear," she thought, "if we're in for much more of this kind of picnic."

Her terrifying dreams Georgy could not remember in the morning; only the one (twice repeated, she believed) in which, with Rixen elongated to about twelve feet at her elbow, she wandered through the long, black barn, lifting the white cap from the heads of the three condemned criminals, to see each time her father's face. "I'll try and get hold of your young man to-day," thought Myra at breakfast, looking at the white face with dark-ringed, dilated eyes, "he can take this job on; it's too wearing for yours truly."

And that evening, at the end of a show which she was amazed ever to have got through without collapsing — she had let Knight carry her as if she had been a baby and he a gentle nurse, and had felt her head spinning and lost a stirrup at Patrico's high leap — Georgy found Otto waiting for her at the entrance to the show ground, and yielded without a word to his suggestion that they should walk back together.

"Chorche," he said, after they had walked a hundred yards or so in silence, "don't you think, perhaps, you ought to gif me another chance? I know I was to blame; you see I haf lived a long while as a bachelor and I haf not been used to really nice girls like you. I haf turned over new leaf since we became engaged; but sometimes one falls back into old ways. I will tell you honestly, I had taken just a tiny drop too much cognac, to take away a cold I had got in the damp here. You must realise, Chorche, that

if we were married, I would haf no temptation to drink too much or to make games with little girls. It is the waiting I found too hard for me."

"There's something in what you say, Otto. A girl has her pride, but I—I've no right to be hard on people. Our nearest and best, what do we know about them really? What they are capable of, I mean."

He edged closer and tried to put his arm around her, until she gently repelled him.

"Does this mean you will forgif?" he pleaded.

"You must give me time, Otto."

He stamped pettishly. "No! No! Not more time. That is the cause of all the trouble. It is the waiting, waiting, wears out my nerfs."

"I can't possibly give you an answer to-night, Otto. My head's like lead."

He grew solicitous at once. "*Ja* you have had an offul shock, I know. The *Mädchen*, Myra, told me something of it. . . . That brute Rixen. I would bash his dirty face . . . if I could meet him."

Georgy's teeth chattered. "Don't talk about meeting him, Otto, please. It would kill me, I think."

"But you see, Chorche, once you were married to me, you need haf no further fear of that rascal. Naturally, I should protect you. Now, I can't, not as I would wish."

"Would you, Otto? But my poor father! Who is going to protect him? And what is it he is threatened with?"

"Do your coat up, Chorche; you mustn't shifer like that. I must get you a drop of something to warm you, as soon as we are in the town. Chorche, if you marry me, of course I shall do eferything in my power to help your poor father. You see, I haf so many friends eferywhere on the Continent, I haf been so much longer than you in the business; and they will find out for me, if it is possible, where that poor Freddie can be and what we ought to make about it."

"You will really, Otto?" Her voice lightened with relief.

"*Ja gewiss!* For my wife eferything." His arm went round her waist and she did not remove it.

"Chorche, let us be married at once. What do you say to next week, at Middlesbrough? I can get special licence."

"It's much, much too soon after Mother's death."

"What can it matter how soon it is, if it is quite private? Of course, I would not ask you to make a wedding with confetti and champagne so soon after your dear mother's death. But just you and I go together to the Registry —"

"No, to a church, Otto; it must be in a Catholic church, if you don't mind." On the brink of this leap into the unknown, she felt a sudden desire to plunge back into the associations of her sheltered past, to recover the soothing, familiar images of childhood. The interior of the convent chapel rose before her, memories of occasional visits to the Brompton Oratory and other Catholic churches with her mother. She had not been brought up a Catholic if any regular practice or intelligent adhesion to the mysteries of that Faith be implied; the nuns' instructions and her rare confessions to the brisk, grey-headed convent chaplain had glanced from the surface of her immature and unself-conscious personality. But she had known no other impressions of religion than those of her mother's faith, nominally her own; and she wanted now to draw near to her mother in one of the few associations left. The wanderer Amalia had passed away, leaving scarcely any vestige of herself upon earth: no home, no traceable relatives, no property but a tarnished velvet album of portraits, the prayer book and the rosary that had been buried round her neck, with two or three small pieces of jewellery in an iron cash box, the remains of the little store that her jealous husband had valued at hundreds of pounds. She was nowhere to be found now but as a vague presence in the twinkling gloom of one of those little Catholic chapels where she used to make her occasional erratic devotions, as much perhaps for the consoling air they brought of her native Italy as for the dim sense of supernatural succour they bore to her barbaric mind. Yes, her mother must be present at the wedding; Georgy felt she would need the support of her judgment.

"Well, I don't mind," said Otto, who had been weighing her request, while these thoughts drifted through her mind, "though I didn't know you were so religious, Chorche. But it is a wonderful thing the Römisch Katholisch Church. When I was in Milan for

the winter of 1910 there was an arch-priest at the Duomo, in charge of the music . . ." And he wandered into anecdotes, from which he emerged at length to say, "So, although I am Protestant-Lutheran, I don't mind being married in a Katholisch Church. It is to be next week then, Chorche?"

"If you wish it very much, Otto."

"Goot!" His eyes shone blue with childish satisfaction under one of the first gas lamps of the town. "Now let us go somewhere if we can, to get glass goot wine to warm you; you are still shifer-ing."

4

Barlowe received the news of Rixen's threat, when Georgy gave it him, with a grim smile. "Funny," he said, "that I didn't tumble to Joe at once. I ought to have guessed it could only be him. He's about the most poisonous snake in the whole show business. These wax-works must be a new side line of his; brought them from France, I suppose."

The middle of the week ran through quietly with no attempts at disturbance. The Vascelli gang, if it was really in Skippom, seemed to be staying down by the race course, and Joe Rixen remained invisible. In a day or two Georgy had regained all her strength and fitness. On the Saturday, however, the last day of the races as of the circus, Barlowe took Birlingham aside just as he was entering the men's dressing tent for the evening show.

"How about that science of yours, young man?" he asked him.

Birlingham's eyebrows went up. "Are they coming to-night, then, Guv.?"

"Well, it's to-night or never, ain't it? And I don't mind telling you I had an anonymous letter telling me to break my route and not pitch at Middlesbrough — 'jever hear such impudence and madness? — to which I sent a reply addressed to Joe Rixen Esquire at the Temple of Illusion, telling him I'd make Middlesbrough so hot for him if he followed me there to make trouble that he'd better try hell for ice cream."

"Maybe he'll take the hint."

"Maybe, but we've got to be ready to-night more than we've

ever been. Saturday evening in Skippom race week is about as tough a proposition any year as I know; with devils like Rixen and Vascelli in the place, it don't do to take any chances."

The fair ground indeed was packed so as almost to wedge the alleys solid, and the noise was like a continuous roaring of surf. The bells, the shots, the screams were louder than ever; but towards eight o'clock, after the circus band had made its blaring tour of the grounds in a waggon decorated with coloured lamps, the crowd set in strongly towards the circus tent, and for a while Barlowe forgot his anxiety in satisfaction at the quickly filling benches and the swarms round the ticket waggon. Inside the big tent the throng was noisy and hilarious, but not at present vicious, and the worst that was reported from the entrance was that a few louts had shoved into the threepenny seats without paying; this Barlowe checked by putting two extra men on guard. Then he emerged again on to the front platform where a clown and some acrobats were doing a free parade to tempt the onlookers; though this was hardly needed, since both sixpenny and shilling seats already had "Full" boards out. In front of him the ground was packed with a dark mass in which the bright hats of the girls and the pink and blue ribbons of the "teasers" that they and their swains were thrusting into one another's faces made flecks of colour. There was screeching laughter at this horseplay, and here and there in the heaving sea were more violent eddies from which the sound of drunken singing went up. Yet in all this, again, was no special note of menace. The only thing that disquieted the proprietor was that he could not find a single policeman in sight in case of emergency.

He turned back to the inside of the hot, chattering tent with its thick smell of tan and orange peel. The show seemed to be running smoothly, though the applause was in places a little tumultuous, and sarcastic cries and whistles attended the ringmaster and his solemn-faced attendants between the acts. Once indeed a clown imprudently venturing on some practical joke with the people in the front row had his face smacked by an angry man in a loud waistcoat, a well-known local bookmaker; but before he could resent it and a row begin, Birlingham interposed and by a violent solitary boxing match produced general laughter. So

the first ended in an excited but not ill-tempered atmosphere.

During the interval Barlowe took another look in front, and was relieved to find that the crowd outside, relinquishing its hopes of admission, had broken up and was streaming round the other shows. It was not till near the end of the programme, while the band was softly accompanying the flying trapeze artists, that he caught sounds which alarmed him. Far away outside he heard singing, not the disordered bellow of a mob, but a defiant chant, with an organised, almost military, swing to it. At the same time, there penetrated the walls of the tent a growling murmur, broken by one or two female shrieks. The audience rustled and turned their heads as the band hummed its waltz; and Barlowe in a flash was away from the ringside and out on the platform before the entry.

The trampled turf before the tent was clear but for a ranked body of men, the front line of which, showing grey bowlers and checked trousers diversified by jockey caps and stained breeches, seemed composed of low-class bookies and their touts; behind these were huddled the ragged sweepings of the race course. Around, holding back in a frightened but excited horseshoe, pressed the mob of the Fair, sniggering hobbledchoys and newspaper boys with their posters, edging forward to enjoy the mischief.

As the circus proprietor, conspicuous in his white dress-shirt, emerged into the light of the acetylene flares, there was loud booing from the gang, taken up by hissing from the fringe of crowd beyond. Three of the four front attendants in their plum-coloured uniforms were holding the tops of the three wooden stairs, while the fourth at the foot of the platform was patiently listening to a red-faced man with curving black eyebrows, clearly the leader of the gang. Barlowe at once sent an attendant running to gather all the grooms and hands that could be spared from the performance, armed with their sticks, behind the flaps of the entrance. Then he strode to the edge of the platform and demanded of the man below what was the matter.

"We vant to come in," called the gang leader with a touch of foreign accent, "and vat's more, we meana to, so are you asking for trouble, Mr. Showman?"

Barlowe temporised. "You can't come in, sir; the house is sold



right out. There's not standing room even. You should have come earlier if you wanted to see the show."

"Come earlier?" roared a voice, as a thick-set man, with plaster strapped across his forehead, stepped out of the ranks. "A bloody lot of good it did me to come early on Monday, you swine!"

Barlowe recognised the drunken gangster who had been ejected from the opening performance and (with excess of zeal, he now felt) hurled down the wooden steps, on which he had cut his head.

"Do you know who I am, then, you dancing poodle?" shouted the leader.

The circus owner's chin jutted out. "Yes, I know you, Mr. Vascelli, and what's more, you dirty wop, I know the man that's behind you in this. Why doesn't he come himself to do the job? But, let me tell you, I've already warned the police about you and your gang."

"Police! Would you? Vell, before you see a blue bottle, my friend, I'll pounda your face into a pudding — that is, if you don't let me and my friends in at vunce. We're going to give vun extra turn to-night, vich you won't forget in a 'urry, just to teach you manners."

Vascelli pushed toward the foot of the stairway; the attendant thrust him back with a hand on his chest; in a second he had whipped out a little black life-preserver and felled the man across the steps. Barlowe blew piercing blasts on a police whistle, and at the signal his men poured out of the tent and lined up grasping their cudgels. The mob swayed and uttered a sinister groan as a stone hurtled from the back and smashed one of the lamps, which fell in tinkling fragments on the platform, dimming the scene. At the same moment the Vascelli gang, swearing and brandishing their life-preservers, swarmed to the assault of the platform.

The circus men met the shock with alacrity, and for a few moments there was a *mêlée* of oaths, rattling sticks and body thuds. A white-faced rough with lips like a knife-edge rushed at the manager, swinging a stocking above his head. A groom jumped in between, to receive the deadly sandbag full on his skull. He sank groaning just as Barlowe's gnarled fist caught the rough's jaw and knocked him spinning over the edge of the scaffold. Then a

fierce surge of the gang flooded the platform and the circus men were fighting desperately for the inner stairways. Men rolled down them into the tent, grappling and cursing, while others leapt the seven-foot drop between the stairs and assaulted the circus grooms behind.

Inside an attempt had been made to carry the programme through to a finish. The trapeze performers had gone and Riegelmann with Georgy and the elephants had entered the ring. But the uproar outside grew too alarming; the spectators nearest the doors began to leave their seats in agitation and stream down the gangways. Then a little knot of hitting men was borne up the entrance passage right into the outer racing track, and at this sight the house broke loose. Women screamed and men swarmed over the benches into the arena, some shouting for "Good old Vascelli!"; others protesting at the interruption of a show they had paid to see; a few from a sense of fairness espousing the cause of the circus people thus brutally assaulted.

Georgy found herself with the elephants in the midst of a pushing, excited crowd. "Look out!" she cried in a high voice that was lost in the hubbub. "If you frighten the elephants, they'll trample you!" Nobody seemed to heed her till Maharanee gave a shrill toot of rage and slapped out with her trunk. A youth with a yelling, distorted face threw up his arm, and, luckily for himself, slipped on the trodden turf and fell before he was struck. He overturned two others as he did so, and the bystanders scattered in a panic that cleared a ring round the great beasts. "Now get them out quick! Otto! Fritz!" panted Georgy, and at a sharp trot, the crowd readily clearing a way, the elephants were led by the two men to the far exit of the track. Georgy tried to follow, but was jostled from behind and jerked forward into a press of men who were forcing their way through the throng, bellowing and waving their fists in excitement rather than savagery. One of them, seeing it was a woman in front of him—for Barlowe in one of his whims had lately banned her brown Indian boy make-up—lowered his fist and slung her out of the dangerous path in which the feeble were being trampled. Georgy staggered and recovered her balance just as a hand from behind snatched at her turban, which was studded with sham jewels, and plucked it off. She

wheeled, slashing with her riding whip at a ducking pair of shoulders; then the whip snapped short against a heave of bodies and she was carried away breathless towards the entrance.

Her foot caught on an unseen stair and she stumbled backwards, shielding her face with her hands as she fell. Her back scraped against canvas and she struggled upright against it, letting the throng bear her upwards. An acute pain as a boot trod on her foot warned her that one of her slippers had been lost. Then the press thinned, and with relief she found herself in the fresh air, clinging to the railings of the platform. The surge of the crowd bore it straight forward over the ledge, jumping, stumbling and falling to the ground, while the stairways were a jammed mass with lighter figures sliding down the balustrades.

But suddenly Georgy lost sight of the struggling mob. On the open turf below Barlowe, his white hair in disorder, was fighting, back to back with his youngest groom, against Vascelli and a group of his lieutenants. An informal ring had been cleared by the bystanders, who had no taste for sharing such blows. Georgy heard a couple of sharp smacks and saw two gangsters bowled over, head over heels nearly, as Barlowe's practised fists shot out; then, just as the groom lurched forward, dragged by two roughs, Vascelli, dodging round to the other side, struck at the old man's head with his life-preserver.

Georgy cried out loudly, and as if at her call a lithe form shot between Barlowe and the chief of the gang. The stranger, catching the Italian's upraised arm with his right hand, brought it down across his own extended left arm with a wrench that made Vascelli howl. Every effort that the gangster made to wriggle out of this grip was answered by a fresh jerk that threatened to break his elbow backwards; he was pinned by an expert. Georgy clapped her hands; but dropped them again in dismay, as the two roughs, having kicked the prostrate groom senseless, made a dash at the newcomer from behind. Had he an eye at the back of his head? Anyhow, his leg shot out, tripping the first of them with a thump that left him motionless on the grass; then, swinging his prisoner round like a living club, he knocked the second one backwards, whistling for breath. And still Vascelli, like a man impaled, agonised in the deadly hold.

Then in a flash the scene changed. A terrified shouting came from the dim background outside the flare of the surviving lamp; the crowd began to run in all directions, and into the patch of light pranced a squad of heavy mounted police, their spiked helmets gleaming as their trained horses, shifting massive haunches from side to side, broke up the mass into frightened knots. Behind the mounted constables a block of foot police pushed forward, thrusting with their fists at the dissolving mob. None waited for a more forcible attack; only the prostrate gangsters and a few groaning persons injured by falling from the platform were left on the ground. One or two of Vascelli's men, bolting blindly into the track of the advancing police, were seized and disarmed.

"So you've actually come, have you, Sergeant?" asked Barlowe, and fell down flat with a red streak dyeing his hair. Georgy rushed down the steps to tend him, while Sergeant Mowbray (who had at least atoned for early neglect by telephoning promptly from a neighbouring farmhouse for reinforcements and mounted men) strode over to the stranger still gripping his moaning prisoner.

"Let me take him now, young fella' my lad!" he expostulated; "yo'll bra-ak his arm like that, you know."

The young man by a twist brought Vascelli's wrists together, and the Sergeant, automatically responding, clapped the handcuffs on. Then he started and eyed the young man curiously.

"Wait a bit, you," he said, as he fumbled at the back of his tunic for his notebook. "Who's going to give me the particulars? Is the old gentleman fit to speak yet?"

"Better take me first, Sergeant," said the stranger in a deep, slightly vibrant voice. "I came on the ground," he glanced at his wrist watch, "about fifteen minutes ago and heard an uproar in front of the circus tent. I found a crowd of about five hundred people in front of it, with the prisoner and those two men" (he jerked his head towards the roughs he had fought, now also under guard), "assaulting Mr. Barlowe and his groom. The prisoner had a life-preserver in his hand and was aiming at Mr. Barlowe's head." Sergeant Mowbray and the chief of the mounted police, who was standing with his horse's bridle over his arm, scratched industriously with their pencils.

"I prevented the prisoner from hitting Mr. Barlowe," the stranger went on, "and then those two others assaulted me from behind. The tall one has a sandbag in his trouser leg." The ruffian spluttered; but a policeman who was holding him thrust a hand in at his waist and drew out a tube of India-rubber. A murmur went round the onlookers. "Go on," said the Sergeant. "Both men," resumed the witness, "had previously kicked the groom several times on the head while he was lying on the ground. I was about three yards away then, and saw at least five kicks given. Then they attacked me and I had just stopped them when the police arrived."

Georgy watched with amazement this clear-headed person who so coolly dominated the situation. He was tall and lithe as she had noticed at first; his large eyes seemed vaguely melancholy now, though they had shone with little black fires during the battle; a grey line or two marked the dark hair curling round his temples. Yet it was a boyish face, the cheeks thin, the chin square, the mouth long and straight. His beard, if he had not been closely shaved, would have been stiff and dark.

Sergeant Mowbray paused with his notebook still open.

"That's what we wa — ant," he said and grinned. "Now p'raps yo'll tell us when *you* were in the force. They don't teach yo' to hold a prisoner like that or to give evidence like this at Eton College or the Council School."

The young man smiled with a gleam of white teeth. "That's O.K., Sergeant, but I wasn't trained in your force. I did seven years in the Royal Canadian Mounted."

The two officers looked at him with interest. "Glad to see you at our canteen later," said the mounted man quickly. "Let's have your name, address, and present occupation, meanwhile," said Mowbray.

"Name, Darrell Carless. No fixed address in England. Occupation, circus rider."

"Member of the coompany, then, I suppose," said the Sergeant.

"Not yet," put in a husky voice behind him. Barlowe, too tough a subject to be disabled for many minutes by a mere contusion, was standing leaning on the arm of one of his men, holding Georgy's spangled handkerchief to his head. "Mr. Carless was to

have joined us next week at Middlesbrough. I didn't expect to see you at Skippom, lad."

"No, Mr. Barlowe," said the young man respectfully. "But I had the week free and thought I'd see the races before joining up at Middlesbrough."

"By God, I never thought I'd be so glad to see you," said Barlowe, holding out his hand. "It's Monday for Middlesbrough, my boy."

"He'll have to stay a day to give evidence," put in the Sergeant, snapping to his notebook.

"So will I, you bet," said the proprietor. "I've had enough of these gangs, and this time I mean to expose the man who was behind the business. Come along to my waggon, Carless. You can do with a drop, I dessay, and so can I."

"Monday at ten at the Town Hall!" the Sergeant called after them, as he forcefully marched his men and his prisoners off the ground.

"Where's Carless?" asked Barlowe, who had gone a few paces and stopped.

The young man was standing where he had left him, staring at Georgina, who, by the light of the solitary acetylene flare, looked almost visionary in her pale Oriental dress. She too was gazing at him, but with a puzzled, half-resentful look. There was a pause in which the bell of a motor ambulance sent to pick up the casualties of the riot was heard.

"Do you two know each other?" enquired Barlowe.

Both started and looked away, Georgy with a quick frown, Carless flushing and embarrassed.

"Well, it's time you did, anyhow," went on the manager. "Carless, this is Miss Georgina Dufay, my star *haute école* rider. Georgy, Mr. Carless introduces his jockey act next week. Make him welcome among us."

Georgy strode forward and offered her hand. "How do you do, Mr. Carless," she said coldly. Carless fumbled, dropped his hat, tore at his glove which would not come off, and took Georgy's hand with a swallowed murmur. Then he stepped back like a soldier recalled to attention. Georgy smiled a little scornfully as she turned away to look for her slipper.



Barlowe and his new performer came on a day late to Middlesbrough, having been detained for the hearing of the summonses against the rioters. The magistrates were glad to commit Vascelli for trial at the assizes, but though Barlowe and a local solicitor and the police worked hard all Sunday, they could find no trace of Rixen. The French manager of the waxworks denied that he had ever known such a person: Vascelli was obdurately silent about any instigator; and Barlowe's solicitor held that there was no evidence to establish Rixen's complicity in the riot. "I can't waste time and money hunting down Mr. Joe," Barlowe at length concluded, "no doubt I'll have some chance to get even with him later"; and he hurried on to Middlesbrough, whither, he learnt with a relief, the Temple of Illusion had not followed him, having struck South again. "So we sha'n't want your police but your circus talent now, Carless," said the manager.

But the newcomer's circus talent, Georgy quickly perceived, was not great. A little ashamed of her curiosity, she watched his first appearance, peeping through the entrance curtains. She liked his placid old white horse and she liked the cleanness and litheness of his limbs; the waist beneath his striped jockey's vest was small but powerful. Yet there her admiration stopped, and she told herself that Carless would never be a big success. It was hard to say exactly why. He did the regular tricks of the ring jockey accurately enough, seldom failing in a jump or a balance, but it was this very precision that took the life out of them. He did them like a soldier who knows his drill. He would never, Georgy felt sure, dream of inventing a new one nor do what he had learnt just a little better in a burst of enthusiasm: as well expect a sentry to dance at his post. Carless showed neither elation nor dissatisfaction at the polite applause that followed him at each show out of the ring.

In the life of the circus he was quiet and good-tempered. He seemed to take little interest in what went on around him, whether business was good or bad, the audience warm or chilly; he sought no intimacies with his comrades, though he was always quick in lending a hand when he saw some one wanting a helper. Then

usually he drifted away to sit on some upturned box or barrel, watching with absent, dark eyes the rings of smoke from his cigarette—there was always a fag in his mouth, even in places where Barlowe sternly pointed out to him the NO SMOKING notice.

Georgy's ear was quick to catch the judgment of the circus world upon him. "A nice young feller," said Watts, the clown, pursing his lips. "Good egg, I think," Birlingham murmured vaguely. "He's a dear," said the mother of the Risley troupe, when he had peeled potatoes for her while she washed her latest baby. "Very slow," Myra complained with a contemptuous lip.

Georgy had an irritated feeling that his eyes were generally on her when she was about, but she could not convict him of the rudeness of staring. Ever since, at their first meeting, her admiration of his fighting prowess had given place abruptly to an obscure sense of conflict, she had felt constrained by his personality; he seemed to be the only one of the decent young men in the circus that she had failed to make an easy comrade of. His silences, his brief replies, his curiously dominating presence made her think of a horse that would not let itself be mounted. One day, impatient to break the tiny, annoying spell, she found an excuse for praising his horse in the stable. His teeth flashed in a smile as he called his comrade to take notice of the compliment. "Come, Trooper," he said in his vibrant tone, and the old white head was willingly stretched out for Georgy's caresses.

"Have you had him long?" enquired Georgy after a pause.

"Brought him over from Canada."

"Did you ride him in the police?"

"No; he's out of a cavalry regiment. He was a band horse before; carried the drums."

"Did you teach him ring work yourself?"

"Yes." He stroked Trooper's back reflectively. There was another silence and Georgy felt embarrassed.

"You like being in the circus?" she asked at length.

"Well enough." His indifference was like a stone wall.

"You've travelled a lot, I expect?"

"A bit. Up and down."

There seemed no more to say. "Well, I must be going," she remarked lamely.

He smiled again. "Good morning, Miss Dufay."

She walked out of the stall with erect head, angry with him for making her feel shy, angry with herself for not having resisted the impulse to speak to him. But that evening, with the elephants waiting ready behind her and curling their trunks round her body to gain her attention, she was again watching Carless go through his act and again feeling her secret little pleasure at the suppleness of his loins, as he landed in the ring from a leap and swung round, jockey cap in hand, saluting the audience. Then suddenly Otto put his arm over her shoulder, flourishing the special marriage licence, which had just arrived.

6

Georgina and Otto were married in their travelling clothes early on the Sunday morning between two Masses at a new little Catholic Church in the begrimed Northern town. The rising sun seemed to fling a hushed enchantment over the narrow nave, softening the crudity of the red brickwork and white pillars, as Georgy came up to the stone altar propped on squat, floriated columns and surmounted by a gaudy Gothic tabernacle. She had noticed with a thrill of reassuring familiarity as she passed, the blue-robed Madonna, with her stand of votive candles flickering yellow in the dust of the sunbeams, as well as the little side altar over which leant the effigy of the Sacred Heart. With her she had brought Myra, whose presence she could hardly refuse, and the old clown, Watts, who had consented to accomplish the form of giving her away. Otto had brought an acquaintance with a sharp nose and a Prussian moustache; and he and the sacristan of the church were to act as official witnesses. Who the dozen or so of others in the church might be Georgy did not know; she hardly expected that any of the circus people, busy with their early start for the next town, would stray in; these watchers, she supposed, were frequenters of the church lingering out of curiosity between services. But suddenly she recognized Birlingham's great nose in a front pew, and then with a little start, at the far end of the same row, Darrell Carless, watching her out of his melancholy, abstracted eyes, his hands in his coat pockets. "What has it got to do

with him?" she thought with a momentary irritation. . . . She had not asked him to come to her wedding.

But here was Otto already stumbling through the words of the troth, his German accent deepened by his nervousness; "in sickness and in helt, till det do us part", she heard him mumble, and as the priest in his gold-fringed stole turned to her, dictating authoritatively, "I Georgina take thee Otto to my wedded husband", the solemnity of the vow for the first time made its impact upon her. It did not reawaken now the doubts that had assailed her during the few weeks of her engagement, and again since its renewal after the breach at times when she lay wakeful at night or rested wearily between acts at the circus. Rather, the words came to her as a challenge that summoned all her loyalty and courage to the answer. Her voice that had begun almost timidly could be heard all down the church as the promise drew towards its end, "in sickness and in health till death do us part."

And when the priest, after joining their hands, sprinkled them with holy water and blessed the ring upon the salver held by his acolyte, the tawdry little chancel and the cheap stained windows behind it were filled in her eyes with majesty. Otto stooped over, clumsy in his embarrassment, to thrust the ring upon her finger, and she felt a surge of affection for his chubby, fair-headed presence. She would never be alone now: Joe Rixen was a black shadow dwindling off her horizon; she had henceforth a comrade and a child. The soft light that bathed the church, the calm of the haloed figures on the windows, would accompany her through her married life. Everywhere was simplicity, wholesomeness and peace. She felt her inner self lightened and illuminated. In a few minutes the shortened rite for a mixed marriage was over, and they passed into the minute sacristy to sign the register.

As Georgina came out again on her husband's arm, she cast a last look towards the sanctuary and its brass lamps burning dull-red, a last look round the homely little church, feeling as reluctant to leave it as if it were some harbourage of safety. Otto looked at her enquiringly as she hung back, and smiling she moved down the dusty nave with him until they came under the gallery by the doors. There Birlingham was waiting for them, his hazel eyes dancing cheerfully. Georgy's eyes were a little wet as

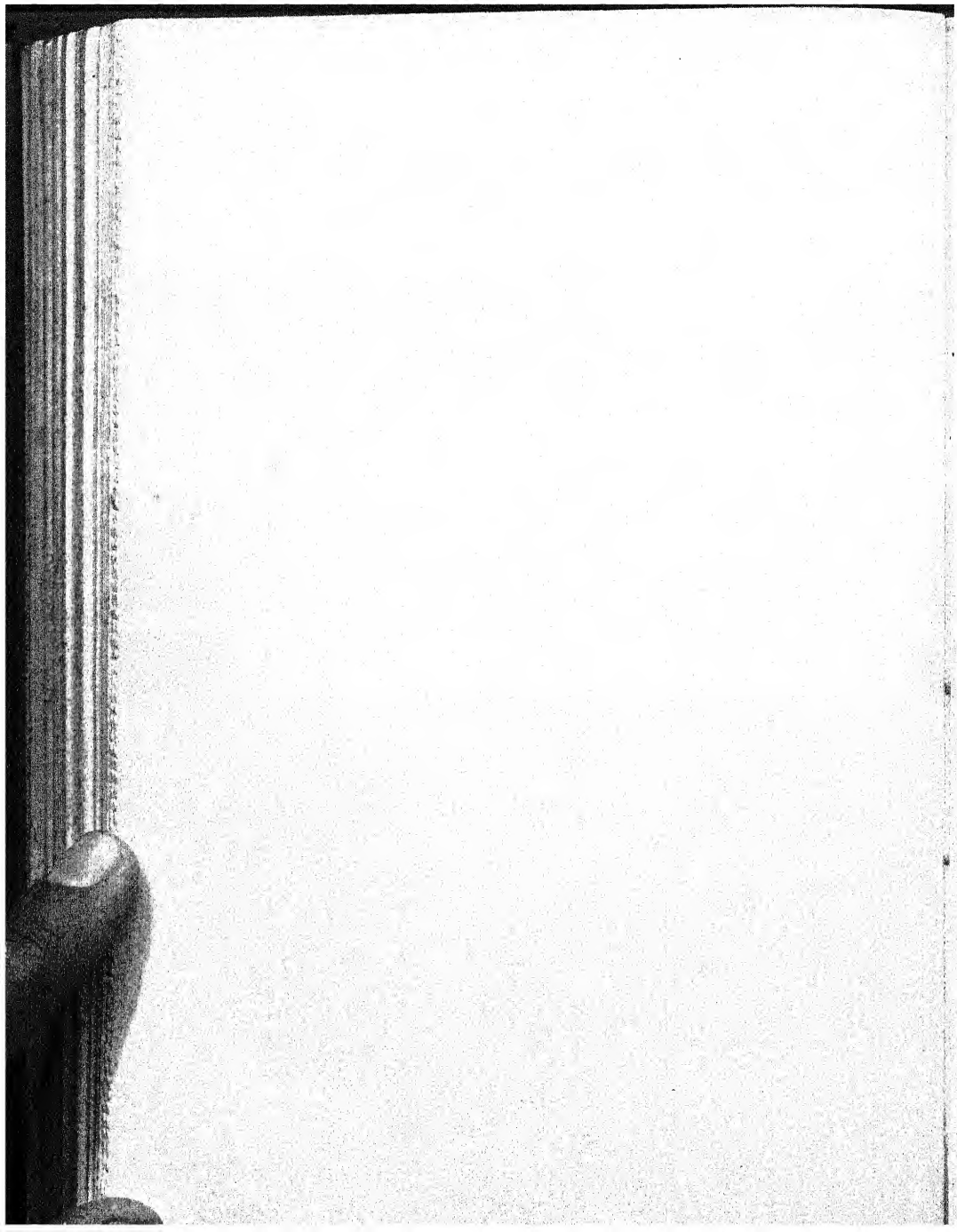
she answered his smile; then she saw him turn to a figure in the shadow under the gallery. "Come, Carless, my lad," he said, "wish 'em joy and let's be off, or we'll miss the excursion." Carless raised his eyes with diffidence to Georgy's, and she felt a questioning flame in them, as if a soft flash from a distant lighthouse had momentarily dazzled her as she drifted by. He murmured a few words that she could not make out. "Thanks, Carless," she heard Otto answer with a patronising and possessive nod.





BOOK TWO

FRANCE



## CHAPTER ONE

### I

THE illuminated clock tower, looming through a paler circle of fog, showed a few minutes after two as Georgy pushed open the frosted-glass doors of the performers' entrance to the Horticultural Hall, Pentonville. In a hutch at the near end of a terra-cotta brick tunnel, furred with neglected dirt, the doorkeeper studied the racing news in the *Star* beside a feeble fire. He looked up as she passed and, with no sign of welcome on his morose face, threw down a packet of letters on the wooden ledge. Georgy looked at the envelopes as she went along the vaulted passage, mounted three stone steps, and pushing back the yellow swing doors, entered the lofty hall where the giant Fun Fair was in the second week of its December to February season. The alley in which she stood examining her letters was lined, on the one side by the horse stalls of the Circus, on the other by the cages of the menagerie. A mixed smell of animals, orange peel and damp walls fell thickly on the nostrils; a horse's hoof stamped behind a canvas curtain; parrots shrieked from a far corner; a band of school children out for a treat chattered round the den of a sleepy bear; and, through the dim chill of the fog-laden atmosphere, the hollow thunder of a lion's voice complained.

Georgy turned to the left and passed round the curve of the built-up Circus amphitheatre. Before her stretched the melancholy expanse of the iron-girdered structure. The vast floor was dotted with exhibition booths and sideshows, among which the rare visitors drifted with a lost look. Above their heads the pall of yellowish fog reduced the arched glass roof to a spectre. A mechanical organ roared with cheerless energy; the gilt crests of stagnant

roundabouts loomed in the distance; high up on the far wall glimmered a huge round clock, like a pallid moon with black markings streaking its rim.

Georgy came to a recess of brick arches in which her elephants, chained by the legs, swung and stamped on a wooden floor littered with dirty bits of straw, begrimed crusts and squashed oranges. They thrust out coaxing trunks as she went by, and she paused with an absent air beside them while she tore the wrapper off the *Billboard*, the great American circus paper that was regularly sent to her husband. Grete snatched the wrapper from her hand as she did so and thrust it experimentally into the lumpy pink gulf of her mouth. Maharanee furred her trunk and gave a toot of boredom.

Georgy did not notice. She had opened the second envelope, an oblong one addressed in a business hand. It was a bill from a dressmaker unknown to her, charging fourteen guineas for a gown and three pounds for a hat. Bewildered, she turned to the envelope again; it was addressed to Mrs. Otto Riegelmann — abruptly she understood the compromising misdirection. A faint flush dyed her cheek bones and the harsh lines that had traced themselves about her mouth stiffened. Then she shrugged her shoulders, wondering, as she did so, that two and a half years of married life had already left her so indifferent.

She turned to the third envelope, a stiff one, with the monogram of the Savile Club on its flap. She knew Birlingham's neat writing and only glanced at the four closely written pages inside. That would amuse her later; it could wait now. Frank had temporarily deserted the circus for the music halls. He had suddenly leapt into a furor of fame. The biggest variety theatre in London was crowded now each night to watch him leaning confidentially over the footlights as he poured forth a murmur of agreeable nonsense, varied by a slow, half-spoken song and a step dance. Illustrated papers caricatured him; his nose, eyebrows and tilted hat on a blue ground enigmatically sabred the hoardings. Yet he would, she believed, come back to the ring; some words in the letter she held caught her eye.

"This filthy lucre will take me to Greece one day, and secure me, I hope, an old age in a library of leatherbound classics" —

What were classics? Frank always expected every one to know everything.

"But my nostrils simply twitch for a whiff of the tan again. There's nothing homely about a wooden stage with a row of lamps to hide your audience from you."

A whiff of the tan again! If only he would come back! She could do with a friend. She had not had one since the tour during which she was married — it seemed more like ten than two years ago. It was not that old faces did not turn up again in her world. Here were her husband and herself working once more under Barlowe, who had accepted the contract to provide the Circus for the Fun Fair. Here was Myra again, enormously fattened, with her snakes — Georgy's mind darted off along a bitterly contemptuous tangent. Used Otto to make surreptitious love to Myra all the time before and after their wedding? No one would ever believe what a blind little fool she had been, till her eyes were wrenched open. Well: never mind Myra; one more or less mattered little. Old Watts was retired to a country cottage in a fishing country; he had always been a saver. . . . But she must not stand dreaming here — it was time to find Otto and make him dress. She moved to cram the letters into her bag and found she had overlooked one on thin, foreign notepaper. It was Franklin, writing from Rapallo. . . . The coloured statuette of her was on show in London, then; she had not known that. Franklin said the critics judged it his best work, "that's thanks to the model, not the modeller, my dear Georgy." His queer crabbed little handwriting was like the old script she had seen in some museum, Greek, had it been, or Egyptian? "You ought to go and see it and tell me what you think," he wrote. That was all very well; it was a matter of finding time. Two shows a day, five animals to look after with the help of only one German boy, a husband to watch, and a baby who could not be left entirely to a young nursemaid left little time to find the Leicester Square Galleries. Besides, one really couldn't go and stare at oneself!

A footstep clattered down the wooden stairway from the dressing rooms at the foot of which she was standing, and a man running down nearly jostled against her. He threw himself back into

the corner with a murmur, and then slipped past her, touching his cap with his whip. It was Darrell Carless, ready dressed for his jockey act, the only other member of Barlowe's old company in the present programme. As he hurried away towards the stables, Georgy made a movement as if to recall him; but checked herself. "It's no use," she thought, "we should only start chipping as usual. We never understand one another."

That morning there had been trouble at rehearsal. Barlowe was trying to run the show at the Horticultural Hall as cheaply as could be. He had engaged as few artists as possible and was bent on getting as much out of them as he could. Georgy reflected that he would not have dared two years ago to propose to her what he had now done. But at that time Riegelmann's Elephants had been the hit of the Christmas season at Olympia, and Riegelmann's Elephants, who could deny it?, were a poorer show now. One misfortune on top of another — but should one call one's faults misfortunes? — had made it necessary to sell Adelma, the Arab mare, and the dogs, and to go back to the old act with just the three elephants. It had been a set-back, too, when Olympia had refused this year to take her as a single act, even with Patrico's jumping, which she knew was out of the ordinary. He had won two prizes at shows since she had bought him from Barlowe at the time of her greatest prosperity, when she and her husband came from a successful season in Berlin to Olympia. Barlowe had at any rate engaged her as his *haute école* rider, but he had not been content with that and the elephants. To vary the evening from the morning programme, he had devised a double riding act in which Carless, he had decided, was to figure as her partner, in figurations and dance steps. And the first rehearsal had been a disaster. Perhaps it was not Carless' fault, for the horse Barlowe had allotted to him for the act was hardly trained to it. And perhaps she would not have lost her temper if she had not been awake till dawn after that scene with Otto last night; only she had really thought when he began to smash the glasses that the child was in danger. She had not been in bed at all and had only dozed on the sofa from about five to seven. Anyhow, at the rehearsal Darrell Carless, after several stupid mistakes, had cut right across her by a wrong turn and cannoned into Knight, making him rear. At that



she had lost her self-control and found relief in an angry outburst. She had felt ashamed when she saw the deep flush on his face as he lowered his head before the storm, and she had been just now in the mood to say she was sorry. But, of course, he had gone by without a word to her — he had a rare turn for doing the wrong thing. Never was there so irritating a fellow in his silences, his awkwardnesses and that sort of inner indifference he maintained even when most clearly in the wrong, most publicly humiliated. "He is conceited," she thought, "for all his modest ways."

The white face of the clock swimming in the fog caught her eye, and she saw with a start that it was already half-past two. She had meant to take a look at Patrico, who had been out of the bill for two days now, owing to a swelling on one of his knees — troubles always came in a heap — now there was no time for it. But where was Otto? She had not seen him since she heard the door of the lodgings slam after him that morning. Perhaps he was already in the dressing room; she climbed the stairs, but the room was empty. She shrugged her shoulders hopelessly: she did not know where to look for him; she must get into her riding clothes.

2

An hour later, dismounting from Knight, after finishing her act before an audience so thin and tepid, as it lounged upon the high wooden tiers, that she wondered if it was worth while keeping the show going, she was accosted by Fritz who came running up to her anxiously, enquiring for "the boss." "I haven't seen him, Fritz, either," she answered; and then realised that the situation was serious. There was only just time for her to change into Indian dress before the elephants came on, and if Otto were still missing — "No, he's not in the dressing room," said Fritz despairingly — well, then she and the boy would have to take them through, as best they could, and this would not be easy in an act arranged to employ all three trainers. Thank goodness Barlowe was away that afternoon; he had cut rehearsal short in order to catch a train to his winter quarters at Barnet. The present audience, she hoped, would not notice the mistakes that she and Fritz would be unable to prevent the animals from making.

But the blunders were worse than she had anticipated. Fritz did his best, but perspired and lost his head. There were moments when the great beasts (she could have sworn with malice in their eyes) stood looking over the fence of the ring as if inviting the fat mothers, who sat with their fidgety children gloomily watching, to take note of the breakdown; even the ringmaster presumed to shout rude remarks from the side. At last they got the beasts out of the ring; but, as she passed through the entrance curtains, Georgy ran against the unexpected figure of Barlowe, fresh from an early return in gloves and overcoat. He had thinned and lined during the last year and his temper had grown sourer with dyspepsia.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded, glowering at her. "Do you think I'll accept that for an Elephant Act? Do you or do you not? Can't you answer?"

"I'm sorry," faltered Georgy. "My husband ——"

"Why isn't he here?"

"I don't know. He's away. That is — he is ill," she answered, faltering a little at the obvious lie.

"Ill? What's the matter with him? Where's the doctor's certificate?"

Georgy felt desperate. "I can't explain ——"

"It would take some explaining," broke in Lushcombe. "You never saw such a rig-out, Governor! The people were going out, and there weren't too many of 'em to start with."

Georgy looked at the ringmaster dully, surprised at this outbreak of malice in a man to whom she had done no harm and with whom she had no quarrel.

"You and your husband are ruining the show," broke out Barlowe, touched on the raw by this reminder of the ill success of the season. "And I used to think the world of you! Gave you your first chance I did, till you went and messed yourself up. Anyway, I've had enough of it. You and your husband can go at the end of the week."

"That won't do, Mr. Barlowe." Georgy felt anger rising within her. "It's Mr. Riegelmann not me you ought to settle this with. I can't take notice for him, and anyhow, you know our contract is for eight weeks."

"Eight weeks! Contract!" Barlowe blazed at her. "Don't you know you've broken it? I engaged him and he didn't appear to-day. That's enough."

"Settle that with him, then," said Georgy proudly. "My contract, you know, is separate. I've not failed."

"Yes, you have. Your riding at rehearsal this morning was a bloody disgrace. I won't keep either of you another week. If you think you're injured, sue me. You'd have a pretty tale to tell the courts. . . . What's that?"

The ringmaster had nudged him, pointing with his whip to an arch under which the shadowy necks of dromedaries undulated. Across a large sack at the mouth of their stall lay a figure breathing heavily. Georgy recognised her husband. His overcoat was awry, his hat plastered with mud, his china-blue eyes glaring in a stupefied and defiant way as he tried to raise himself to his feet. A knot of grooms surveyed him with sardonic grins.

Barlowe gave a disgusted exclamation.

"Just what I thought. Well, there's evidence to justify my cancelling the contract, Mrs. Riegelmann. Now you'd better take your husband away."

"'Strewth, he's not much of a decoration, is he?" sniggered the ringmaster sycophantically.

Georgy looked round at the bystanders; not one stirred to help her. She felt that the shame and sordidness of life had at last mounted to a wave that must overwhelm her. Must she move off, trying to support that lump of bedraggled sottishness before these hard and mocking eyes? Could she? She knew Otto's dead weight, and that he might resist furiously if she laid hands on him. She closed her eyes for a moment in a half-conscious, desperate prayer, and, as she opened them saw one of the plum-coloured grooms jostled aside. Darrell Carless came through the group, walked quietly up to Otto, and, raising him to his feet with a practised grip, began to pilot him towards the stairs. Once he resisted, bearing back against his conductor and babbling in a shrill voice. Carless spoke to him in a low tone and he stopped; then the two began to work up the stairs, Georgy following.

Carless led the drunken man to the dressing room; lowered him

into a chair; loosed his collar and drenched him with cold water from the jug. "Got any *sal volatile*?" he asked Georgy.

"Yes, here," she said, opening her dressing case. Carless, overcoming a little struggle on Riegelmann's part, forced him to swallow a stiff dose. His rolling eyes grew a little more conscious of his whereabouts; then he dropped his head on his hands with a groan.

"He'll come round now," said Georgy in dull tones, "and I'll take him home. Thank you."

"I'd rather not leave you alone with him, just now," said Carless, watching Riegelmann with a lowering brow. "Wouldn't it be better to let me take him round in a cab to your place? I guess you've had about enough for the day."

Georgy, with a sudden weakening of her limbs, had sunk on to the chair before her dressing table. "I can't trouble you like this," she murmured.

"The trouble's not mine," he said. "I figure it this way. If I get him to his rooms and into bed, you can rest here until the next show. It'll about kill you if you have to struggle with him and then come back here again and do your act. Say, you look as if you wanted more than anything else an hour's rest in that armchair. Won't you leave it all to me? I'll get them to send you up some tea from the restaurant before I go; lock your door after that, and let no one disturb you."

She smiled with tears breaking into her eyes.

"You're so kind," she said, "after the way I treated you to-day —"

He grinned. "I'm used to being ticked off on parade. I deserved it. Don't let's worry about that now. Say, you do look beat."

"I am beat," she whispered, "dead beat."

Across the back of her chair she looked with loathing at the inert form of her husband, still nursing his leaden head.

"I'll get him out," said Carless.

"One minute," she interrupted. "Tell the nurse to bring baby across to me, will you? I can't leave them alone with him in the house while he's like that."

"Sure," he nodded. "Now come on, buddy," he called to Riegelmann; "bed's your right place." He levered him smartly out of the

chair and led him, still fuddled, to the door. "Leave it all to me," he said, smiling over his shoulder to Georgy, as the two disappeared. She heard their feet stumbling down the stairs and Carless exhorting his companion with ironic cheerfulness. She dropped upon the armchair in which her husband had been sitting; then rose, disgusted by the odour of brandy, and resumed her place at the dressing table. "I oughtn't to have shifted the burden on to him," she murmured, streaking the cloth with a grease paint. "But he was right. I'm played out." For a moment she wondered how she had been able to find herself suddenly at perfect ease and friendship with Darrell Carless; then a pitiless panorama of her married life rolled over her mind.

3

For the hundredth time she asked herself whether it was possible that a man could have degenerated so much as Otto had done since their marriage only two years and a half ago. If he had, the fault must lie in great part with her. But no, it could not be; the vices so patent now must have been there before, and she too careless and inexperienced to notice them. Certainly she had known he was inclined to drink too much, but she had believed it would be easy to break him of that. In spite of the single incident with Myra, she had suspected nothing of his leaning to loose women, which was not surprising, for that he would naturally have kept from her; and even at the price of a little unpopularity she never took part in the gossip of the circus. But had there been no one to warn her? Her mother? Well: her mother counted a prosperous marriage the important thing and had a disbelief in male virtue too naïve and sweeping to be called even cynical. Frank Birlingham? She remembered now his disturbed air in the churchyard when she broke the news of the marriage to him. Ought he to have spoken? Could he have done so? No. She realised that a certain code, implanted by his upbringing, forbade him to speak ill of a fellow man behind his back.

Yet she felt sure Frank would have warned her somehow, if he had known. And she came to the conclusion that he had not known. He had not known, because he had only encountered

Otto in a better phase. He must have been making some headway against the drink and the other dissipations to have been so prosperous and effective in the ring as he was when he joined Barlowe. Possibly too when he was courting her he had lived a rather cleaner life, if only for prudence' sake. That was the truth: he had gone downhill since the marriage.

It was hard now to remember the steps in their estrangement. Perhaps the first rift between them had been his untidiness, exasperating to a girl who had inherited from her mother a Spartan precision in the ordering of her person, her clothes and her possessions. Dwellers in caravans could not afford to make muddles. But Otto seemed to have the power to make any rooms in which they lived look like a plundered village. Vain of his own appearance, he would go out spick and span, leaving a trail of towels, cast-off clothes, shoes, boot-trees, unstoppered ointment bottles, spilt water, charred cigar ends all over the bedroom and oozing into the living room.

That might be only an irritation and a weariness; since she had to restore tidiness after him, or stifle; but it was the sign of an increasing laziness. There was now some one to do everything. "Chorche, my dear, fetch that; it will be sweet of you." "Chorche, my dear, answer that letter; I don't write English well enough." "Oh! Chorche, run upstairs and fetch my cigar case; my feet are all corns to-day." After the first few weeks, he seemed never to have breakfasted out of bed. A small matter, but it meant that he was more and more often late for rehearsal. Perhaps she had not been patient enough. . . . She was hasty and outspoken and had begun to make him fear her tongue. He gave up regaling her with his long discourses on the news in the papers, feeling that she took no interest in them, now that they were stale; and no new topics of sympathy arose between them. They spoke less and less to each other. She ought to have struggled to knit fresh threads. That furtiveness she now noticed always in his apparently candid, shallow eyes, that malicious curl-up of the ends of his lips beneath his moustache, when he had a chance to get his own back by scoffing at some lapse of hers from memory or order — a more tactful woman would not have let them become habitual; but Georgy was not tactful. Nor could she believe she had been wise about



his brandy drinking. The first bad outbreak after their marriage she had forgiven; at the second, desiring always decisions like a clean knife thrust, she had insisted on binding him to teetotalism and had banished alcohol from their table and their rooms. She ought to have known it would only mean his drinking elsewhere secretly, and of course that had meant the company of low women — it had all been because she had not understood, had tried him too hard, exacted too rigid a code of conduct from him.

She sprang up from the table, stiffening her body in revolt. But no, she could not have stooped to coax and beguile him. It was a wife's duty, was it? Well, it was for her impossible. A husband had duties too. Something hurt and proud fluttered in her breast. She would not be a beast of moral burden; she was a partner, not a slave. Better anything, better all that had befallen than to cringe before his vices in the dim hope of curing them. She experienced again the nausea that had overcome her the day when, trying to clear up heaps of his clothes, she had found, somehow wrapped up in them, a pink-frilled woman's garter with an enamel medallion clasp of a nude Venus. She had thought she would never feel clean again: indeed she doubted if she ever had. "But then why did you marry him?" a voice inside asked sternly. "He was not your sort. You ought to have known. You *must* have known!" Yes that was true; nothing she could suffer was too heavy a punishment for her folly.

Suddenly, with a bitter smile, she remembered some story she had read in a cheap magazine in which the birth of a child was held up as the cure for ailing marriages. Yes, she had heard silly women speaking like that too. Funny web of lies people spun round life! The coming of little Pansy had been the real disaster. During the time of her pregnancy, when she had had for a while to stop riding and give up working with him; when she could not go out with him to restaurants nor satisfy his needs; then it was that he had rushed in his erratic way down the slope. She had felt his vindictive annoyance that for a time all the toil of supporting them had fallen on him. He had even dared to taunt her with it one evening when he came home drunk; and then, for the first time, he had broken into one of those savage alcoholic rages which had in her naturally nervous state daunted her. In those months

when he was left to himself he had badly damaged the reputation of Riegelmann's elephants; they had begun to go down in the circus world since then. He had sold Adelma and the dogs without consulting her; yes, and she had caught him just in time to prevent him from selling Knight. She shivered with fury now, at the memory of it, months ago as it was. They had raged at each other: he had struck her and she had caught up her riding whip, only to fling it away with a realisation that if he provoked her to that, he would have succeeded definitely in dragging her to his own level, would have made a squalling harridan of her. She had looked at the receding brow, the sneering curves round the nose where it split the moustache, the hard glitter of the flat blue eyes, with a feeling that she had never seen the real man before. No, she could not retaliate on such a creature; she must hide what was left of her more and more within walls of ice away from him, keep her baby clean of him, live with him as if he did not live with her — but, of course, she smiled sadly at the glass, that only set him more free to pursue his own ways; in a sense he could hardly be blamed with such a wife. Sometimes she had prayed that he would desert her; then the memory of the marriage in the little Northern church had stolen back, afflicting her with a dread sense of the sacrilege of a marriage broken, upon whatever excuse. "For better, for worse," she had sworn with all her soul; there was no escape now that would not leave her perjured in her own eyes, her moral being shipwrecked by the confession that she could not carry out her own pledges. And she had known women who left their husbands for other men. Loose-lipped, sloppy-minded, they had seemed to her, lapsing lower and lower in vulgarity. And, anyhow, Otto would not desert her, so long as she could work for him — a gracious bond between them, a fine sequel to the moment when the priest had joined their hands with his gold-fringed stole.

A rap came on the locked door. Some one tried the handle and then the ringmaster shouted, "A message from Mr. Barlowe, Mrs. Riegelmann; please let me in!"

"You can give it from where you are," she retorted.

She heard him grumbling, and then he raised his voice again. "The elephants aren't to go on to-night."

"Very well. You can go."

The man jerked the handle again; then she heard his steps pass down the stairs.

The elephants not to go on! As if she cared whether they ever went on again? She was tired of them too; the throng who toyed with their trunks for a moment or two in the stables, rapt at their intelligence and apparent docility, really knew little about them. They were cunning and they were vindictive. Maharanee had made up to her at first when she was delivering her from the Indian tormentor; but had soon grown malicious, one day snatching her bag for no reason and trampling all its contents to pieces. Grete, while Fritz was sweeping out her stall, had kicked him on the knee, for no apparent purpose, and disabled him for a month; there was no trusting them. There was a disquieting craftiness in their small, watchful eyes.

No: she was afraid and weary of elephants; their gross misshapen bodies, their skins of the texture of mouldy soil had no charm for her. The stench of their stalls, the litter they flung about disgusted her. She was a horsewoman — why had she ever thrown in her lot with these gross beasts? The clean, quivering lines of Knight, Patrico's compact strength, had the power to lift her out of the sorrows of her worst days; she would be glad when she could devote herself wholly to them again. Knight, the loyal, intelligent friend, Patrico with his timid devotion, which had taken the place of a terrified stupidity — were better than human beings, both of them, and Georgy felt a desire to go down at once and see them. She glanced at her watch; it was getting late. She quickly changed back into her riding habit, and before the mirror rouged and darkened her eyelashes. As she moved to the door to unlock it, however, there came a timid tap, and the little nurse-maid entered with a frightened face, carrying the baby, well wrapped up against the foggy frost. "Is she all right, Ivy?" asked Georgy anxiously. The girl nodded. "Fast asleep, mum. Mr. Carless said as I was to bring her over, the master being that queer."

Georgy loosened the wrappings a little to see the baby's face. She was sleeping with a wonderful tranquillity, no disturbance of her breathing, no little grimaces or puckering of her face. Her

mother, looking, was struck into a momentary happiness by the lovely curve that the tiny mouth already showed — Amalia's own aristocratic lip — and she stood for a second dreaming of the beautiful girl who might blossom in ten or fifteen years from this bud.

"We won't wake her," she said at length, "make her comfortable in the armchair there. Have you had tea, Ivy? No? I'll send you up some food from down below, then."

"Master was off to sleep," said Ivy suddenly, as Georgy was leaving the room.

"How do you know?" asked Georgy.

"Mr. Carless fetched something from a chemist. He said he'd fix him for the night. Those were his words, mum, and he thought in an hour or so I might take Baby back. He's a very kind gentleman, Mr. Carless, isn't he, mum?"

"I must thank him for all his trouble," said Georgy briefly and vanished down the stair.

The fog seemed less choking now; the Hall was fairly full and, with the drab daylight shut out by the electrics, more cheerful. The roundabouts swam on full swells from their steam organs; there were shots from the shooting booths; and lines of girls and young men linked arm in arm paraded to and fro. As Georgy came down, the steam organs stopped and the circus band blared from its gallery above the arena. The Overture! She had only just time to saddle Knight and give a sheen to his coat. But when she reached the stall, she found him ready saddled and Carless using the rubber.

He looked round. "Thought you wouldn't be angry, if I did this for you to-night. This old trouser," he paused to look affectionately at Knight, "sort of invited me in, over the edge of his box."

"Is there going to be any end of the things you're doing for me to-day, Darrell?" The word had slipped out without her noticing it; she always called her men friends by their Christian names. Darrell showed no signs of noticing it, either, but there was fresh vigour in the hand with which he concluded his grooming of Knight.

He threw the cloth back into a bucket and stood up.

"Your husband will be asleep by now," he said, "I gave him a sleeping draught, so as you could have a quiet night. If you want the kid to get back to her cot, I'm sure it's all safe now."

Georgy gathered up Knight's reins. "Thanks, I'll tell the girl when I come off. I've no time now." She swung into the saddle, smiling as he dodged round to help her. No man had she ever needed to give her a leg-up on to the tallest horse.

"I'll get the kid off, all right," he said, "but you've a good ten minutes still. The Mocattas are only just going in." He laid a hand on Knight's neck. "Would it cheer you any to know you're not the only one who's had the bullet to-night?"

"Why? Who? Oh! Not you, Darrell? When? Why should he do it?"

"Sent for me to the office, just as I got back from Havelock Crescent after tucking up your husband. Week's notice; said he must cut down expenses and the Burgess Brothers were coming on Monday to do a double jockey act. So I wasn't wanted."

"What a shame!"

"Oh, I wasn't counted out, you know. I'd had it in my eye some time. I'm no first classer. But the point is, when he said he sacked you because your act broke down, that wasn't honest. He jumped at the chance to cut more salaries. He's lost badly here, I'm told; you can't blame him too much. Only you don't have to feel worried that you're going off. What he said about your riding, that's all poppy-cock. You don't have to worry; I know what it feels like to have the sack because you're not up to the mark, but you've no cause to feel that way."

"Why do you tell me this, Darrell?" She could not keep the tenderness out of her voice as she sat looking down at him, where he leant against the side of the stall in the place from which the horse had just moved of its own accord, his dark head beneath the printed placard, "KNIGHT (Miss Georgina Dufay's)."

"Because one more sleepless night's liable to knock you over, and I want to stop that if I can."

"You have, Darrell," she said softly. "I felt when I came here this afternoon that I hadn't a friend in the wide. I shan't feel like that any more."

"You mean it?" He stepped forward eagerly.

"I do indeed." She shifted her whip into the left hand with the reins and held out the other. He clasped it.

"You know, you can count on me for anything I can do."

"I *am* counting on you, Darrell."

"Thank you — Georgy."

"Number 4!" came a bellow. "Look alive, can't you?"

Georgy struck Knight to a canter with her heels and rode into the ring.

4

She went through her act this evening with a strange, serene buoyancy. Somewhere far below her stirrup iron still stretched the stinging sea of her troubles, but a word had been spoken that forbade the waves to drown her. Knight surely felt her mood; his responses came so swiftly. Again that stirring sense of union stole over her, his strength flowing through her veins, her consciousness filling his lithe and sensitive body. The current thrilled from his mouth to her hands, from the heave of his flanks through her knees. They were not two, but one creature, sailing through tinted sunset clouds. . . .

When she rode out, leaving a warmed house behind her, old Harry himself hobbled forward to take her reins. As chief groom nowadays, he seldom did more than direct the younger ones; and, glad as she was at the sight of his wrinkled face, on which the white hairs still eluded the razor, she wondered what the honour meant.

"Miss Georgy," he whispered, as soon as she dismounted, "there's a gentleman's sent round his card."

"Oh! Harry!" She shook the handle of her whip at him. "You know I never take cards from gentlemen. Send it back at once."

"No, Miss," said the old man, grinning, "you haven't got it right. This is important."

"What did he give you, Harry?"

Harry opened his white cotton glove a second and showed the brownish pink of a ten-shilling note.

"All that! This is your lucky night, Harry, but it's not his. I wouldn't see him if he gave you five pounds."



"It may be your lucky night too, Miss. Don't you be foolish, my dear. You've got the wrong end of the stick. This is an *old* gentleman."

"That's the very worst kind, Harry."

"You do take me up so, Miss. I say he's not that kind of old gentleman either. He's a lord or I'm a Dutchman. French by the lingo of him, and, as I say a lord, or a big proprietor."

Georgy checked herself. "That's another matter. Why didn't you say that at first? You really think it's business, proper business?"

"Sure of it."

"Show me the card."

Harry extracted it from a pocket inside his uniform. Georgy read:

M. VICTOR DUSSAULT,  
HOTEL MALAKOFF,  
BOULEVARD MAILLOT,  
PARIS.

"Victor Dussault?" she muttered. "Where have I heard that name?"

Ah! Suddenly a picture took shape. The twilight auctioneer's yard in the cold spring evening, the yellow circle of lamplight and Imperiali's brown eyes quizzically yet seriously regarding her. She felt a throb of excitement. That mystery was to be solved at last. "Bring him up, Harry!" she cried. "Bring him up at once to my dressing room."

She raced upstairs like a girl; her four years of strain, bereavement, suffering, seemed to drop off her shoulders as she ran. She was picking up life again at the last golden moment of her childhood—for so in retrospect that afternoon, for all its pain, had ever seemed to her.

She flung open the dressing-room door. Baby had been taken home; the place was not too untidy. She siezed some clothes from a chair and pushed them onto hooks behind a curtain. Suddenly a whiff of brandy assailed her. She rushed to the dressing table and snatched the *eau de cologne* spray that her husband always used.

She had just finished disinfecting the furniture when a knock fell on the door.

"Come in!" she cried, trembling. The door opened; Harry's plum-coloured figure appeared for a second and disappeared, bowing profoundly, and a tall, grey-haired man in a blue frieze overcoat stood surveying her with rather glum dignity.

He bowed. "*Parlez-vous, par hasard, Français, Madame?*" he enquired bluntly.

"*Mais oui, Monsieur,*" and in his own tongue she asked him to be seated.

His relief seemed great. A little twinkle appeared in his deep-set eyes, washed almost clean of colour and streaked with faint lines. "To speak the tongue of reason again!" he exclaimed, "after three weeks of your island charabia!" He sat down, holding the brim of his black bowler upon his knee. Vaguely she felt it ought to have been a cocked hat. She was saying to herself, as she studied the lean, hale face with little strawberry mottlings, the bony eagle nose and the white moustache and imperial, "A retired officer," when she heard him apologizing for his insistence. "I am, I can well believe, perfectly unknown to you."

"But no, Monsieur. Curiously, you are not a stranger to me at all."

She laughed at him with a childish glee. He seemed bewildered.

"Is it possible, Madame, that we have met before? I do not think so, for I seldom forget a face, nor," he bowed suavely, "would one easily forget yours, Madame."

"No, Monsieur, but I was told that we should meet one day by an old friend, M. Imperiali."

"Imperiali? He told you of me? Come now, that was very strange! Prophetic, eh? Then you know who I am, and I need not make explanations."

"Unluckily, Monsieur, he told me nothing but your name. I was to remember that always . . . and I had forgotten it until to-night."

"*Un farceur, Imperiali, n'est-ce pas?* Of what use to name my name only? And you, Madame, never enquired further?"

"I never saw M. Imperiali again before he died."

"I regretted his end very much, believe me. A great horseman, a master of the circus."

"And you, Monsieur," suggested Georgy, "are also, I feel, a master of the circus."

"Ah! No, Madame, you flatter me." He unbuttoned his coat in the heat of the room and she saw the little rosette of the *Légion d'Honneur* in his buttonhole. "Only an old soldier who had the honour of serving France in '70 in the field and of helping with other *invalides* to garrison a fortress in the last war." He did not tell her that he had been a mounted page attendant on Napoleon III's Master of the Horse, and taken part in the last grand stag hunts of the Empire: that he had ridden with the cuirassiers on their fatal charge in the last hours of the sweltering day of Reichshoffen; had had his thigh crushed by the fall of his horse upon it among the vines, and a bullet graze on his lung as he lay on the ground, trying to get free of his cuirass; and that he had since then always been lame and a little weak in the lungs, unfit for active service. He explained, however, how he passed his unwelcome, wealthy leisure.

"*Un amateur du cirque*, Madame," he explained. "I have always had a passion for horses and for the *haute école*. Would that I had been in my youth a pupil at the Vienna Imperial Riding School! But I have taught myself and been taught by any master I could find to give me something new. And now for twenty years I have had my own circus — private, it is well understood — in the stables of my house, in the Boulevard Maillot. All Paris, Madame, has honoured me by attending my rare representations; and, I, naturally, have sought to give displays not unworthy the attention of all Paris. May I now solicit your aid?"

Georgy's brain whirled. "I don't understand, M. Dussault, exactly what it is you want of me. And how did you hear of me at all?"

"The last is easily explained. This very day in your Laykester Galleries — *hein? Laster*, is it, *Lester?* — oh! Madame, what a language! though I can speak it well enough, if I must — well in those Galleries there, I saw a figure of you."

"Franklin's statuette?"

"Franklin, yes; a fellow of genius, do you not agree, Madame?"

I am struck by the statuette and I desire to see the original. I demand is there a circus in London? Everybody denies it until at last I hear of this fearful hall in the *banlieue*; but no one can tell me if Mademoiselle Dufay is riding there — what an organisation! What a people! I come out here, nevertheless, on a desperate venture. Fortunately for me, Mademoiselle Dufay rides to-night, the *affiches* proclaim it. I make my way to the side door. No one knows a Mademoiselle Dufay — what intelligence! At last appears an ancient who explains it is Madame Riegelmann I seek. I tell him the name to me is equal, I must see the lady. There is trouble as if I had asked to uncover a priestess of Isis — *drôle de pays tout de même!* — but at last I am here and I make my request."

"Which is precisely?" she asked, trying to control her voice.

"That you will come to Paris and allow me to train you to ride my *pur-sang* Ruy Blas for my forthcoming representation in April. Why do I ask you, whom I find in this second-rate *troupe de province*? It puzzles me to understand myself: but there is about you, Madame, a *je ne sais quoi* that recalls to me my favourite sculptures. *Enfin*, Dussault can afford a whim! If you come, I will find you also a part in the equestrian pantomime *Veuve Satan* that the poet Regnault is writing for me, music by Pradel. Do you honour me by accepting?"

"For a private performance, for one night only?" Her disappointment was marked.

"Madame, I have never yet paid a performer for appearing at the Cirque Dussault. In Paris it is taken as an honour, though I believe that profit often follows that honour. Naturally I do not expect you to derange yourself and face the expense of this journey without compensation. But I am offering to take you as my pupil — without charge — you understand?"

"I become your pupil?"

"Madame, you will allow me full frankness? You have spirit, beauty — you permit me to say so? — aptitude, but you have simply everything to learn for the true *haute école*. But, while you as yet know nothing, I believe — I don't know why — that you might learn, *ma foi*, everything! I *give* the lessons — it is a chance for you, Madame; I have never done it before! — you give your services when you are perfected."

Georgy hesitated. "No doubt, M. Dussault, I have never been thoroughly trained. My mother died too soon and I had not been intended for the circus. But I do not know if it is worth while now to begin again."

"Have you no ambitions then? Don't you want to appear at your Olympia, at the Cirque d'Hiver, at the Zirkus Busch? They will never take you as you are. When I have done with you — ah! Yes! Am I not reasonable?"

Georgy smiled. "You forget, M. Dussault, my husband and I are not rich. How should I live in Paris while you were training me?"

Dussault waved his hand. "That is foreseen. I am not without influence. If you will tell me what you are paid in this miserable *baraque* I will undertake to get you twice as much at the Cirque d'Or in Paris. You will work there at nights, in my *manège* by day. Will that satisfy you? Will it satisfy your husband? Where is he, may I ask?"

"Ill, M. Dussault. But you need have no fear of his disagreeing. He is a trainer of elephants; if I came," she paused and her jaw hardened, "I would persuade him to take his elephants on tour in England, alone."

"He would spare you like that?"

"We are out of an engagement. We must do what we can."

"Good. May I call it an agreement? I will telegraph to Michel at the Cirque d'Or to-morrow and also to engage you a suitable *appartement*."

Georgy rose. "A moment, M. Dussault, a moment! I must reflect."

He produced a jewelled case with gold-tipped cigarettes in it. "May I offer you one? May we smoke here?"

She took one, noticing that the jewelled crest on it was an imperial crown and the initial E.

"A souvenir," he said, answering her glance, "from the late Empress of Austria, that unhappy Elizabeth! Madame, *she* was my pupil. Poor Empress! She would have been happier under the canvas of the poorest circus of her dominions than in the Hofburg. . . . Well, Madame, and your decision?"

Georgy took a turn up the room and back. "I agree," she said

abruptly, "if you can secure me an engagement at the Cirque d'Or for the length of my stay in Paris."

"You need not trouble about that." He rose and held out his hand. "*Mille remerciements*, Madame. You have interested me strangely from the moment I saw the little figure in the Lessester Galleries. I will make something of you; after all, you have the temperament and your horse loves you. I will write about your *appartement*, about everything."

He took his leave and began cautiously with his lame leg to descend the stairs.

Suddenly he heard a footstep running and his name was called. Turning round in the dim well of the staircase, he looked up and saw Georgy beckoning to him with a flushed face and an eager air.

"M. Dussault, I must make one more condition."

A shade of irritation passed over his bluff face. "Ah! Not more conditions, Madame, I beg you. What is it then? I thought we had agreed."

"M. Dussault," said Georgy breathlessly, "you must do one more thing for me. I have a friend here who is out of an engagement. I would be glad if you could find another opening at the Cirque d'Or?"

Dussault looked resigned. "For him or her, Madame?"

"Him. It is the young man you saw in the jockey act here. He is — he is my friend; it is hard to explain. But if I go to Paris he must go too. Both of us must be engaged at the Cirque d'Or, or neither."

Dussault's imperial dropped, an immense amusement crept into his eyes, and a jovial familiarity suddenly took the place of his rather stiff courtesy. "*Ah! çai!*" he cried. "*Je comprends maintenant!* That *gros gaillard*, he is your friend, eh? You will not go to Paris without him, though you will go without your husband! Madame, you make me wish I was forty years younger. Oh! The fortunate young man! Dussault must be fairly godfather as well as teacher, eh? Well, I will try not to fail in the *rôle*. He is not talented, your friend, *parbleu!* But Michel, I daresay, to oblige me, if your friend does not demand too much. . . . *Enfin* I think I can manage it; we shall see you cross the Channel. Ah! The un-



talented, but happy young man! Youth! Madame! Youth! There is, alas! no substitute in the world for youth!"

At his words and tone Georgy flushed crimson and recoiled on the landing. But Dussault continued to creep down the stairs, exploring the way with his stick and humming a gay little melody.

## CHAPTER TWO

### I

GEORGY felt much as she used to when getting ready for a rehearsal before her father, or when traversing the corridors of the convent to be rebuked by the firm, smiling presence of the Reverend Mother in her private room, as the ramshackle taxicab she had hailed in front of her Pension shaved the gate pillars of the drive and jerked to a clattering standstill before M. Dussault's Hôtel on the edge of the Bois de Boulogne. A flight of stone steps with curved balustrades led down from the double doors of polished walnut, and above, through the mist of the February morning, loomed the tall façade with its sculptures and balconies. Behind the house masses of trees spread entangled branches to right and left, with the roofs of outbuildings peeping between them.

As she jumped out of the taxi, the great leaves of the house doors swung open and a butler in black came running down the steps; in the hall above she saw the silk stocking and gold-gartered leg of a footman. The butler with grave politeness explained that M. Dussault offered his compliments and would wait on Madame in the *manège* when she was ready to mount; would Madame spare herself trouble by directing her chauffeur to drive to the stables, where the Head Groom would attend her?

Following directions from the *maître d'hôtel*, the taxi-driver jolted backwards out of the drive into the wide Avenue again, and turned up a lane to the left that was closed by a turnstile into the Bois. Halfway up this lane a cupola surmounted the lodge and gates of M. Dussault's stables. From the lodge stepped a groom in green coat and white breeches, who took Georgy's suitcase and led her into a large paved courtyard. Bewildered, Georgy looked

round as if she had come into the land of fairy tales. In front of her, the courtyard ended in a line of wrought-iron railings, through which glimmered a circular lake, closed in by banks of trees. On a terrace to the right of it stretched the back of the house with its countless oblong windows. In the dull morning light, mansion, copse and lake seemed as still as Sleeping Beauty's Palace. Three swans moved like spirits over the dim surface of the water.

Georgy took but a glimpse of these wonders. Bordering the lane down which she had driven was a long row of stabling; she could hear horses striking the stones with their feet and rattling at their chains; caught the voices of grooms; and saw boys in leggings hurrying in and out with buckets and brushes. The right side of the courtyard in which she stood was occupied by a long, plain wall topped by skylights, clearly the riding school. The left was shut in by a round, domed building, with a blue and white porcelain frieze of classical riders. Over its porch a marble Apollo lashed the winged team of his chariot. "*C'est le cirque,*" murmured the groom, as she gazed. There was more stabling behind the circus and in the centre of the pavement splashed a fountain with a stone canopy on which rode four bronzed knights with banners.

While Georgy marvelled, there came out through the porch of the *manège* a figure in the same green livery as her guide's, but with swallow tails braided in gold, gold cuffs and cocked hat. "*M. le Grand Ecuyer,*" prompted the groom at her elbow again, as the newcomer, grey-haired and clean-shaven, bowed hat in hand, and invited Madame to enter her dressing room.

Georgy followed the Head Groom through the doors of the riding school, over which hung a single horse's head exquisitely carved in stone, each muscle and the very texture of the coat defined. Upstairs, at the door of her dressing room, the grooms left her, after pointing out the electric bell she was to press when she was ready. There was a thick blue carpet on the floor, a large wardrobe of white painted wood, a dressing table with electric lights and triple mirrors, an electric fire, and chairs of white wood with chintz cushions. An inner door led to a bathroom with porcelain fittings.

Georgy was glad, as she opened her suitcase, that she had, before leaving London, risked making a deep inroad into her savings to buy a silk top hat, patent-leather boots, and a habit of dark Melton cloth at a first-class tailor's. It aged her a little, but its severity did not seem out of place in the stateliness of her new surroundings. She pressed the ivory bell knob with a calm finger.

Yet when the Head Groom, after taking her downstairs and along a corridor, brought her out under an overhanging gallery into the great riding school, she was again filled with wonder. Dussault had pleased himself by having his *manège* built as closely as possible in imitation of the famous Spanish Riding School at Vienna. The oblong hall of dazzling white and gold, with its panelled ceiling, adorned by gilt roses, its tasselled and brocaded boxes and its glittering crystal chandeliers might have seemed a court ballroom, had the floor not been strewn with clean tan. The end which led to the stables had three arched doors of plain wood, fitted with rings of twisted iron; the end which led to the house a door of polished mahogany, above which projected the musicians' gilt gallery, decorated with cherubs' heads singing and blowing on pipes. By the columns supporting this gallery stood three more grooms in green and gold with cocked hats — reproducing precisely, except for the crest on their buttons, the imperial hunting livery of Napoleon III.

For a few moments Georgy stood waiting in the shining silence, broken only by a hoof beat from behind one of the stable doors, while the raw day, filtering through the skylights, threw purplish shadows under the galleries, and the smell of the tan filled the air. Then the polished door opened; the grooms drew themselves together; and Victor Dussault, dressed as if for a court function, in a long frock coat and dark trousers with a gleaming top hat set ever so slightly aside on his white hair — the one horsey note in his appearance — advanced towards her. He came straight to business.

"We will try you, Madame, with Ruy Blas; he is the horse I have in view for you at our performance, if all goes well. He is a powerful animal, but you are big and strong. Raoul, Ruy Blas!"

One of the grooms hastened through the stable doors; there was a trampling on stone, and he returned leading a great black beast

with a silky skin, a heavy arched neck, and slender, deft legs, a perfect school horse, crossed with Arab blood from the Lippizza stud. Georgy was struck by the profundity of his dark eye, which turned on her an alert but slightly distrustful gaze. He was already saddled and the grooms had only to lengthen the stirrups for her.

With reins gathered, she sat on the black horse looking to M. Dussault for instructions. He had taken a lunging whip from the Head Groom, and standing in the centre of the *manège*, invited her with a gesture to pass before him. She rode down the side of the oblong, uneasily conscious of his eyes and those of the four grooms, who stood motionless now at the corners of the *manège*. In the silence Ruy Blas' hoofs made a soft noise on the tan; Georgy felt as if she were in church, so solemn and intense was the atmosphere. Dussault she hardly recognised; the bluff sportsman had become a figure of sacerdotal gravity; his face was a stone mask, with a melancholy droop beneath the white moustache. Silently he turned, walking in a little circle, as she passed across the end of the school and began to come down the other side towards him.

Then in a passionless monotone he began to criticise her riding. From her head to her toes nothing seemed to be where he wanted it. She flushed, but he seemed unconscious of her emotion. "Not so stiff!" he rebuked her sternly, as the horse shook his head at a small involuntary contraction of her fingers. She had been squaring her shoulders in answer to a complaint that followed immediately on a warning that her toes were turned out. She felt as if she were back at her first lessons again and wondered rebelliously if she needed them.

Now Dussault, without praise or blame, was calling on her for the first paces of the school. "*La Piaffel*!" he cried in his sharp voice that echoed from the tinkling chandeliers, "*e-et le Passage*." Ruy Blas, Georgy perceived at once from the delicacy of his responses, was more finely trained than any horse she had yet ridden; but he was worried by her strange hands and seat and hesitant over obeying. Yet every time she used pressure of rein or leg to emphasise her signals, Dussault complained in his melancholy tone. "You are jerking his mouth, Madame." "Your knee is out of place, Madame!" She had known many kinds of lesson, her father's bullying impatience, which never stopped to explain the

mistake he was cursing; her mother's running monologue of grunts and cries, eked out by violent pantomime, Barlowe's heavy sarcasms. But she had not known anything like this monotonous rain of correction. Dussault's patience seemed to be endless; he did not care how many times he repeated the same warning; he showed no more anger at the thirtieth reiteration than he had shown indulgence at the first utterance. At the end of half an hour Georgy felt a weariness of limb such as she could hardly remember; her head, too, was aching with the effort of remembering all his points; she was grateful for the moments of respite when, ordering her to stand still, he would deliver a cut and dried little lecture on some point of principle — "The leg from the thigh to the knee immovable; from the knee to the foot always free, and always disengaged when not in use." "All your body supple and without contractions, Madame." "The hands are not given to pull his mouth out, Madame!"

Slowly, however, she was getting into harmony with Ruy Blas; his hesitations smoothed themselves away; she felt deeper in her seat as she caught his individual rhythm. Dussault began to try the harder steps, the *Levade*, in which the horse stands on bent hind legs with forelegs raised and curved, and the *Croupade*, the measured forward leap from this position. In the middle of these exercises came a dangerous moment, when Ruy Blas, not yet quite trustful or composed, threw himself up almost perpendicularly from the *Levade*. The nearest groom took a pace forward, while Dussault stopped rigid, watching. But Georgy who felt there was no danger of Ruy Blas overbalancing, sat undisturbed until he came down again. She saw two of the grooms exchange glances. "*Maintenant*," said Dussault, "*recommençons; encore, votre Levade!*" And kindly do not fidget his mouth this time, Madame!"

The clock on the music gallery struck the hour with a silvery bell and Georgy was thankful. She could not have stood another quarter of this schooling. She felt stiff all over as she dismounted, while the Head Groom took Ruy Blas' head; but she was pleased to see Dussault's face relax as he rolled up his gloves. He had become human again with his bluff, satirical expression. "Fatiguing eh, Madame? All my pupils say that at first. I tell them it is better they should be fatigued than their mounts. Well, they have taught



you anyhow not to be frightened on a rearing horse." He turned smiling to Dargenson, the old Head Groom. "I believe only Madame Allard would have sat Ruy Blas so calmly during that naughtiness. My best pupil, Madame. Alas, she seldom rides now! But she had, also, the support of a sidesaddle."

A footman had come in with cocktails on a tray. When they had drunk them, Dussault asked Georgy if she would care to see his circus. "There you will perform, Madame, I hope, at about Easter." With Dargenson in attendance carrying the keys, they crossed the great court, now lit by a pale gold sun in which white pigeons swooped and strutted on the painfully scrubbed stones. They entered the little private circus and Georgy felt the beauty of its plainness; the ring fence topped with blue plush, the fauteuils upholstered in the same; the walls white, with silver electric torches, the roof delicately frescoed.

"I hope," pursued Dussault, as they came out again, "that I shall soon have the libretto of my pantomime. Regnault, the poet, promised it before Christmas. *Veuve Satan*, *The Devil's Widow*, it is to be called; we shall have some droll effects and deal some blows at the infamous Republic. Now, Madame, I must leave you to change. To-morrow morning, if you please, at the same hour." He was raising his hat to go, when a thought struck him. "Tell me, though, have you seen Michel at the Cirque d'Or. Yes? It is all arranged as it should be? I am glad. You open when? Next Sunday: my best wishes." His eyes began to twinkle. "And he? The singularly untalented one? What says Michel to him. *Ce pauvre Michel! Quel bouillon!* But I will make it up to him some day."

Georgy reddened and threw her head back. "I am sure Mr. Carless won't disgrace your recommendation, M. Dussault. Of course, judged by your standards——" she shrugged her shoulders. "But he is quite capable, Monsieur, quite, of the ordinary jockey act."

"Happily, Madame, we in Paris can believe nothing wrong of English jockeys. We lose thousands of francs every year in that faith. Michel too must console himself with it. *Au revoir, Madame.*"

"Good day, Monsieur, and thank you."

She watched the tall figure in the slim frock coat move away with its limp through the iron grille and past the lake towards the terrace. The water sparkled in the sun; the swans shone dazzlingly with soft plumage; the trees made dark tracteries on the blue behind. The great mysterious house of white stone seemed still the palace of a dream. And suddenly Georgy felt a desire to know about Darrell; to protect him if the manager at the Cirque d'Or were really being scornful of him; to hear him speaking in her own tongue and reminding her of her own land; to meet homely things again after this hard, bewildering phantasy of magnificence.

2

But it was not until the afternoon that she was able to get to the Cirque d'Or, which was in the Trocadero district. She had first to return to her little hotel in the Rue St. Dominique across the river, to look after Pansy and Ivy and to lunch. The baby was still fretful after the journey, and Georgy tried to coax her to sleep on her own bed in her little room at the back of the hotel. Here the slamming of doors and the shrill calls of the manageress were muffled by distance, and the yellow gauze net across the windows shut off the intrusion of tin chimney pots and bleared attic panes. Not until Pansy slumbered did Georgy at last jump into another taxicab, which drove swooping through the narrow streets over the Pont de l'Alma to the Circus.

The front of the Cirque d'Or was resplendent among the trees and bright newspaper kiosks of a great avenue; and as the cab whizzed past it Georgy caught sight of the medley of posters, — a pyramid of clowns, a famous juggler in a cloud of billiard balls, sea lions in an arctic landscape, the star of the season, an Australian bareback rider, turning a difficult somersault from one horse to another, and, cut out in thin wood over the Moorish columns of the portico, herself in her blue and white habit, making Knight rear. She detected the hand of Dussault in this elevation, and flushed with pleased surprise as the cab, rebounding from the curb, skidded to a standstill in a narrow street filled with market stalls. Here was the artists' greasy entrance, marked out by a lamp with CIRQUE D'OR in white paint across it.

Georgy pushed open the blistered swing doors, and in the passage ran straight into Carless himself. "Darrell!" she cried anxiously, "have you seen M. Michel?"

He smiled at her eagerness. "Seen him? Yes. And rehearsed too."

"When?"

"Twelve this morning, special call for me alone!"

"And did it go?"

"Fine!"

"Oh, I am glad"; she could not hide her relief. "M. Dussault said that English jockeys were the rage here."

"Yes, but you see, Georgy, I'm not an English jockey any longer."

"What *do* you mean, Darrell?"

"I tried out a new act this morning."

"A new act? You never told me a word of this." Her eyes shone a little resentfully. "You *are* mean, Darrell. Couldn't you trust me?"

He gave one of his easy laughs that often irritated her. "There was no question of trusting, Georgy, and I guess you know that well enough. But it was a new idea, and I just don't like to buck about new ideas before they come off. One looks a fool if, after all, they fail, don't you think? But please let me tell you now; and, honest, Georgy, I'm just fretting for you to see the thing, first chance there is. I'm bursting my hatband since the old guy in the white waistcoat clapped his hands and said '*Très fort!*' That means 'Double your screw,' don't it, Georgy?"

She laughed. "Come up into my room. I've got a fine one, though nothing to Dussault's place, — Darrell, it's wonderful; you can't imagine how he lives! Still, they treat me here as if I was somebody."

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star!" laughed Darrell, as she raced up the stairs, taking three steps at a time with her long legs. His face, as he followed her, had an expression he never showed but when her back was turned.

"Here we are!" She threw open the door of the dressing room, with its mirrors, pegs and two worn but comfortable brocade arm-chairs, and tossed her hat onto the dressing table. "Give me a fag,

Darrell, if it's only a French one. I haven't had a smoke to-day; and now tell me at once, what are you?"

"A Cossack, Marm!"

"A Cossack, you?" She had perched herself on the arm of one of the chairs and now bent over with laughter.

"It's not funny, Miss, at all. It's terrifying, let me tell you."

"But you can't speak Russian."

"Neither can the Russians. If they stopped to do that, they'd miss all their appointments. But I got the idea from an illustrated paper, showing Cossacks at their drill. Standing on the saddle, swinging down the side of the horse ——"

"I can do that."

"——and dabbling their bright locks in the dust while suspended by one leg. I'd love to see you, Georgy!"

"Don't be disgusting."

"And shooting at a target head downwards. I could do all that, I thought. I was a Class A shot in the Mounted, and should have got the Shield if ——"

"If what?"

"If the other man hadn't shot better. But Trooper, I knew, could get a pace on, if I exercised a little of his fat off. That I did before crossing — he's beautifully slim now; learnt a yell or two; secured a white cap and coat from the Morris Angel Divisional H.Q., and, as Michel says, it's — what was it? — yes, 'my patent.'"

"*Épatant*, Darrell. You *must* learn some French. He meant it makes you gasp."

"I know better than that; if you start gasping, you draw in enough tan to sweep the ring. But anyhow, it goes!"

"Better than the jockey, Darrell, honestly now?"

"Better than *my* jockey." His voice grew serious. "You see, I'd sized it up and knew that unless I could do better tricks than I shall ever learn, I'd no chance to compete with the swell jockey acts. So I decided to try a change. I think the Cossack will do — till the novelty wears off, as it will, of course."

"And then, Darrell?"

"God knows! Perhaps I'll go back to Canada and try farming. My brother's out there: he ought to give me a job."

"You could really leave the circus?"

"Couldn't you?" He shot a keen glance at her.

"Never!" She shook her short curls. "I'm going on, Darrell, and I'm going to be a star. Yes, modesty be blown. Since I've become Dussault's pupil, I understand what *haute école* means. I'm going to the top or roll off dead at practice."

"From which I gather, that Dussault thinks well of you."

"Not so stiff, Madame!" "Your knee is out of place!" "Hold your head up!" "Keep your toes in line with the horse's body!" He thinks I'm good for nothing but to be glued to broncs with the other toughs in the Calgary stampede."

"Not so much of the toughs; the gentlemen who ride at Calgary —"

"Ought to take an hour's lesson with Dussault. He'd straighten out their bandy legs. But never mind, Darrell. I tell you I'm going to shine at the top of the bill in Berlin — when I'm good enough. By that time Pansy's children will be able to come and be proud of grandma. Meanwhile we're both going to knock 'em here, and you can chaperone what Michel and Dussault leave of me round the sights of this bad city."

"You talk like a kid on holiday."

"Why not? It's my first continental tour since I was six."

A knock fell on the door and a boy's voice shrilled, "*Un télégramme pour Madame!*"

Darrell put a hand through the door and handed the wire to Georgy. She opened it with a worried air, and he saw her face take the haggard and ageing look that drove him mad with rage.

"Something bad, Georgy? May I share?"

She snatched the telegram back from his outstretched hand, flushing; then, with a resigned gesture, surrendered it to him. "After all, why should I try to hide it? You know all my disgraces, Darrell." She turned away to the looking glass, pretending to be combing her hair; but in her reflection he could see the tears hanging on her eyelids. He read the telegram.

PLEASE TELEGRAPH EIGHTY POUNDS AWFULLY URGENT SUMMONS THREATENED OTTO.

He whistled. "What's he up to now?"

She turned round with a weary shrug. "Oh, what does it matter? I have to pay, whatever it is."

"Eighty pounds though; can you manage it?"

She began to bite the ends of her fingers with a hunted look. "No; I don't see how I can. This trip has been more expensive than I thought it would be, what with this and that. Then I had to buy clothes too, before I came, necessary ones. I was depending on my salary here to keep going."

"You could sub. Michel," he said reluctantly. "That is — if you're fool enough to send the money."

A spark of hope came into her eyes. "You think I could, Darrell, so soon?" she said, ignoring the end of his remark.

"Sure, Georgy. You're a little too modest, you know; although you've got such lots of pep. By what I can pick up, Dussault's given you a first-class testimonial and it seems he's a little Lawd-Gawd-Almighty in the circus world here. Michel, whom I take for a first-class snob as well as a swine, laps all that up like champagne. I'm sure you could work him — if you think it worth while."

"If I think it worth while, Darrell, but what else can I do? If you know of any other way —"

He dropped his cigarette end on the boards and ground it with his heel, as if trying to make up his mind. Then he looked up sharply. "I mean . . . you could leave Riegelmann to get out of his own messes or not get out of them."

"Oh, Darrell! I couldn't. I never have."

He looked at her boldly and a little harshly out of his dark eyes.

"Why couldn't you?"

She shook her head. "Duty, I suppose. He's my husband, Darrell, and —"

"Words, Georgy," he interrupted. "A husband is some one who makes a life with you," his voice shook a little, "who cares for you. You and Riegelmann live miles apart. Yes, I mean it. The distance between London and Paris is nothing to the distance that separates you when you're sitting one each side of the same table. He's just a sponge that sucks out of you your earnings, your peace, your happiness, your whole power of living. You behaved like



eighteen when we came up into this room; now, Georgy, you look like an old woman, and you talk like one. Is it worth it?"

An obstinate look came over her face. "That won't free me from the bond that ties me to him, will it?"

"The bond? Why not break it? He has. . . . What good are you doing him, anyway? Does he drink less, drab less, cheat less than the day you married him? Or is he doing it all the more recklessly, knowing that you have to pay for the breakage now? Would he have dared run up this debt at cards or women, or whatever it is, if he hadn't known he could telegraph to you? He takes more care of his soft skin, I can tell you."

"Darrell, it doesn't help a bit to talk like this about my husband. Say all the hard things you like about me for marrying him; I deserve them. But it's too late now; I should have thought of all this before I took the plunge. I had my warning and I've no one to blame but myself."

"You knew nothing. You were just a girl, an adorable child, full of pluck and folly. And for that one false step, the meaning of which you couldn't understand, you now want to wreck all your life. It's a damned sin!"

"It's you that's talking nonsense now, Darrell. There's a right and wrong in these things; and don't you see, besides, that I can't afford to have the disgrace Otto could bring on me — if — if I didn't clear up his messes?"

"It's his disgrace, not yours," he broke in.

She smiled wanly. "That shows you aren't married, Darrell. If Otto gets into Queer Street, I'm in too and so's Pansy. If I wasn't a sort of public person, I might put up with that, but you know as well as I do how narrow the circus world is. Otto banks on that. He knows what I am thinking and that what I am thinking is what every one would think. 'Oh, yes,' they'd say; 'George Dufay's daughter — yes, — *he* went bust, didn't he? They're a funny lot with money.' No, Darrell, I've got to see Otto out of these messes — just as long and as often as he makes them — and — the worst of it is he knows that ——" Suddenly her voice broke and to his horror Darrell saw that she was crying.

He got up and laid his great hand softly on her shoulder. "Don't go on crying, Georgy. That's worse than anything. You've

got me down in arguing; it never was my line. But you know I come of farming people; we just can't see any sense in letting the thistles and the brambles grow to choke the wheat. It may be unkind to root 'em out and burn 'em, but we want to be kind, rather, to the fruitful corn. Still, I guess you've to hoe your patch by your own lights. I'll leave you alone."

She looked up in terror. "No, you'll not leave me, Darrell! I just can't do without one pal."

"Why, of course I'll stand by, just as long as it's possible for me to help — until you see that you don't want me any longer, because you've prevented me from being any real use."

"I don't know what you mean by that. But I know that I can't do without your friendship, here and now, Darrell."

"That's booked all right, Georgy." He looked at his watch. "Now, what about a stroll to see something of this wicked city while the sun's still out? You can't get at Michel this afternoon; the office is closed. I'll take you round and leave you at your hotel in time for dinner."

### 3

Georgy was at the office of M. Michel, the manager of the Cirque d'Or, as soon as it opened the next morning. A smart, rouged secretary took her through an anteroom into a study luxuriously furnished in ormolu, with a thick carpet, ornaments of Sèvres ware on the marble mantelshelf, and a carved bookcase filled with calf-bound volumes on the circus and horsemanship. The walls were crowded with posters and photographs, fresh or dim with years, of horses, equestrians, clowns and acrobatic groups, among which a fantastic oil painting from the last year's Salon, showing a circus ring filled with a medley of clowns, dwarfs, elephants, horses and rope dancers in ballet skirts, held the place of honour with a rim of electric lighting attached to its frame. It was Michel's policy to insist on the aristocratic and fashionable character of the Cirque d'Or and he would not have received his patrons or his employees in any less expensive setting.

He was seated at his polished writing table when Georgy was shown in and motioned her to a chair in front of it. A thin man,

with the flushed, hollow cheeks of the consumptive, a beard like a tangle of drooping brown creeper, dark eyes like two cold pools with watchful depths, and hair dressed to ripple like a Roman Emperor's bust.

To his alert, unsympathetic presence Georgy with embarrassment made her request for a substantial advance on her salary.

Michel pressed his lips together with a gloomy mien. "It is a very extraordinary request, Madame."

Georgy knew that this was not so, but could only murmur something about heavy travelling expenses and an unexpected call on her resources.

"But you have not even opened your engagement. One does not know how you will appeal to the cultivated public of Paris, a very different audience, Madame, from the kind to which you are used."

Georgy protested that her contract was in any case for two months and that the salary due would cover the loan for which she was asking.

"We are taking a great risk, nevertheless," said Michel, in a tone that had disquieting reverberations. He leaned back in his stiff, carved armchair and passed thin fingers through the tangles of the creeper. "I had the honour of dining with M. Dussault at his Club last night," he said suddenly. "We spoke of you, Madame. It appears that you have a rather remarkable steeplechase horse. It is here in Paris with you?"

"My leaping horse, Monsieur? No, I was compelled to leave him in London. I could not afford to bring two to Paris."

"*C'est dommage.*"

"My contract was for *haute école*, Monsieur Michel, and only mentioned one horse."

"I know, I know," he rebuked her. "But circumstances change. We have at present M. Happe with his jumping team, *très fort*. But M. Happe proceeds to Vienna at the end of a fortnight."

"Then you would like to engage me for my leaping act also?" Georgy leaned forward eagerly.

Michel played with a little silver Punchinello on the glass surface of his table. "It had, in fact, appeared to me, Madame, that if the management of the Cirque d'Or obliged you with such a large

loan as you have astonished me by asking for, you might think it only just to add your steeplechase to your act without extra remuneration; or," he had quickly noticed her start of protest, "without heavy addition to your salary. I do not say the Management would decline altogether to reconsider the terms of your contract, to allow something for expenses perhaps; but we would look on it as a return for obliging you. That is surely not unreasonable, Madame?"

Georgy hesitated, revolted at this deftness in making profit out of her distress. She was on the point of refusing, when the picture of Otto dragged perhaps into court, his disgrace blazoned in all the circus papers and circles, rose before her. "If you insist, M. Michel," she said, "I suppose I have no choice."

"It is not unreasonable," said Michel inflexibly. He took up his telephone receiver. "*Le caissier avec le carnet*," he said. "Now, Madame," he went on, hanging up the receiver again and unlocking a drawer from which he took out a sheet of paper with a government stamp, "while the cashier is coming with the cheque book, I will just draw up a little agreement to make everything plain. Excuse me a few moments." He bent over the sheet and began to write slowly and reflectively.

Georgy rose from her chair and, to relieve her irritation by movement, began to stroll round the room, looking at the pictures on the walls. Suddenly she stopped before a faded photograph. It showed a horse tethered to a post with a tent in the background. Some words in violet ink at the corner were illegible with time. "But it's Patricol!" she exclaimed aloud.

"*Pardon, Madame?*" The manager looked up from his writing. "This is my horse, Monsieur!" She pointed to the photograph. "Your horse? But that is impossible, quite impossible, Madame!"

"But I know Patrico, Monsieur Michel. The marking, the head. Of course this is he!"

Michel slewed round in his chair with a knitted forehead.

"But that, Madame, that is a photograph of the famous Aldebaran, the only one, I believe, existing."

Georgy came back to the writing table with a keen interest firing her eyes. "Who was Aldebaran, Monsieur?"

"The great jumping ring horse, who leaped through fiery hoops —"

"Patrico leap through fiery loops? He shies at a lighted match!"

"Then, you see, you are evidently mistaken. Aldebaran was the property of Stultz the Alsatian. He performed at the Cirque d'Or during Stultz's last season; all Paris talked of him, Madame, his nerve and his strength. He achieved the highest jump at the bar that had then been recorded. I forget the exact figure; it is entered in the books there." He jerked his head towards the case.

"And what happened to him then?"

"Stultz retired and sold all his stud. Aldebaran — you have re-awakened a tragic story — was bought in close privacy, it is believed, by an amateur, a young Englishman who kept a racing stable at Fontainebleau, *énormément riche*. What was the name? '*Il a fini par un fait divers*,' as they say. Ah! Robertshaw. *Drôle de nom, hein?*"

"Robertshaw?"

"Perhaps you read about his case? It must be quite nine years ago now."

"His case? No, I know nothing about him."

"He was found dead in the forest with his neck broken. It seemed he had been trying to ride this very horse there secretly when he was drunk. *C'était un buveur enragé*. Of course, there are always those who will seek a better explanation, and there was a rumour that he had been murdered. But Apaches, gipsies, they would use the knife, the bullet. He had no hurt but his neck broken. It was a fall beyond doubt."

Suddenly a picture rose before Georgy's mind. She saw the wet riverside meadow at Reading and the little gipsy with the anxious brown eyes pleading. "Please, Miss, Patrico's not a killer!" Was it possible?

"And where, Monsieur, do *you* say Aldebaran is now?"

"I would give something to know." His eyes gleamed; but he quickly corrected himself. "He has doubtless lost his strength by now, if he is alive. But no one, I think, could tell you what became of him. He was seen by some peasant, crossing the moor after the accident — then, *pouf!* vanished!"

"You say gipsies were accused of the murder?"

"There was no murder. It was an accident. But Robertshaw would go about with gipsies, they said at the investigation. The band vanished so soon as the tragedy occurred. If they had been arrested, more might have been learned — about the man and the horse."

"Patrico was bought from gipsies, before I acquired him, M. Michel."

"*Tiens, c'est drôle!*" He plunged the fingers of both hands in his creeper. "Madame, will you bring your horse to Paris as soon as possible. It is quite impossible what you suggest, but . . . if it should be . . ." He reflected again in silence. "We can know nothing until we compare your Patrico with the photograph. Meanwhile," he wrote a few last words, "here is the little extra clause to your contract. I hear my cashier knocking at the door. He shall witness your signature and then I will sign the cheque for your advance."

"Wait a minute, M. Michel." Georgy pushed the contract form away. "If what I believe is true, I have, without knowing it, a remarkable ring horse."

Michel's eyes narrowed. "I think you will find it is an illusion. Horses are much alike."

"Not to a horsewoman, M. Michel. I shall know. And if my Patrico is Aldebaran, then what he could once do I could train him to do again."

"If he is not too old. This is all *Zukunftsmusik* as the Germans say, castles in Spanish air, in your own language, Madame. Better sign this contract, which is firm ground."

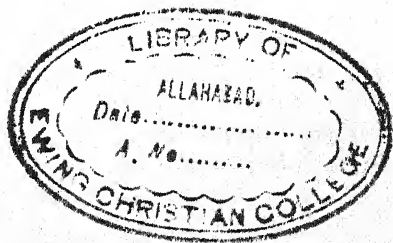
"No." Georgy stood up resolutely. "I'll not mortgage my future for the sake of eighty pounds. If I possess Aldebaran, I'm worth more than you're offering, M. Michel. We'll let it stand over, if you don't mind." She turned towards the door.

"Madame!" Michel recalled her with his cold eyes fixed on her, his hectic flush deepened. "Do nothing hasty! As you say, we had better defer this little matter of the contract." He flung it into the drawer. "And if you are in need of this sum, the Cirque d'Or will be only too happy to oblige you, and you will repay out of your salary, just as you find convenient." He crossed to the door and called, "Leveau, *le carnet!*" The cashier entered with a cheque



book and a ledger. "Sit down, Madame, while I sign your cheque."

"So that's how the wind's blowing," thought Georgy as she obeyed. "I wasn't wrong in my guess, then, and he knows it."



## CHAPTER THREE

### I

"WE see some changes in this life, don't we, George?" Birlingham looked round with a worried face, not daring to throw the match with which he had just lighted his cigarette on to the swept and weeded paths of M. Dussault's garden. "It would be worse," he murmured, "than making a litter on the lawn at John's."

"Oh, put it in your pocket," exhorted Georgy: "eat it, then, I don't care. Only tell me how you turned up here."

It was the midday interval during a rehearsal of the pantomime that was to be the chief item in the Dussault's programme, now only a fortnight ahead. The other performers were still enjoying Dussault's luncheon in the *foyer* of the private circus, and the two English members of the company had escaped into the great garden beyond the stable yard, of which Dussault had given Georgy the freedom.

"How did you come here?" repeated Georgy. "He told me three days ago mysteriously of the *grand excentrique Anglais* that was coming, but I never thought of you. You're a comedian not a clown now, aren't you?"

"Always glad to get back to the sawdust, when they'll give me a living wage, my girl. Dussault's telegram reached me at the Acropolis just as I was undressing. I thought it a practical joke at first, but it's stabler than the franc."

"What are you playing?"

"*Le Gommeur*, anglicé, the knut with a k. But that's not very exciting. It's you that have come on."

"You haven't seen me, Frank!"

"Saw you at the Cirque d'Or last night from the cheap seats,

soon as I got to Paris. Georgy, you were always one of my raves, but this fellow's given you a sort of elegance . . ."

"You think I've come on, Frank? Oh! I *am* glad. I can't tell from Dussault's face. It's always '*H'm, nous verrons,*' or '*Pas trop mauvais,*' never anything definite with him."

"It's definite right enough — not that I'm an equestrian director, you know. But the lad, Carless, agrees that you're leaping upstairs."

"You saw him too?"

"Yes. That Bolshie stunt of his is quite a palpitator in its small way, isn't it? We had a bock together afterwards. I say, Georgy —" he stopped on the edge of the lake glittering in the chill spring sun and absently watched the swans sail past with glowering eye and gurgling wake. "I'm going to drop a brick, no matter if it pulls the house down."

"Do say something that means something, Frank."

"Well then, here goes, whether you bite my nose off — it would be a mouthful — or not. Darrell's in a damn bad way, and, Georgy, you're not treating him fairly."

"Frank!" she flushed deeply and angrily; then stopped short like a horse before an insuperable obstacle and fell silent with troubled looks.

For a moment he had regarded her sternly out of his small hazel eye; now his face relaxed. "That's what I like you for, Georgy," he said. "You can't humbug. Convention says you ought to be furious with me, but you can't be. You want to put me off with untruths and they won't come out of your mouth. But, my dear, since you're too big to defend a rotten thing, why do you do it?"

She clenched her hands against her sides. "Frank, you're quite just," she said in a low voice. "I'm in a hole and I can't get out of it."

"Sure, Georgy? There's climbing, jumping, digging. I've not known you to lie down and squeal yet."

"Thank you, Frank." She looked at him with a rueful smile. "I can do with a kind word, for I haven't given myself many lately. You'll admit then that I've taken what came to me . . . in marriage, without squealing, so far."

"You have, you plucky little devil. Why do you want to spoil it all now?"

"Meaning, I suppose, that I ought to leave Paris — well, as soon as Dussault's show is done, and go back to Otto?" she said hopelessly.

"Meaning nothing of the sort, Georgy."

"Like . . . like the others . . . you think I should leave my husband."

"I think that's your business, not mine. There are limits to my meddlesomeness, though you mayn't believe it."

"Well, that's not fair!" Her eyes blazed. "You butt in to make me feel a worm and then you back out before the responsibility of advising."

"The responsibility is Georgina Dufay's and that's not my name," he said bluntly, though his eyes were still smiling.

She swerved aside. "Have you seen Otto since I left England?"

"Yes," he said, gazing at the water. "He started in at the Acropolis the same week as I."

"I know; he wrote. They had to take him off, because the stage wouldn't stand the weight of the elephants."

"Lies!" replied Birlingham. "They took him off — well because of the old story. You don't suppose Fritz Ritter can take the brandy bottle away from him, do you?"

"Nor can I, Frank, if you mean that. I won't humbug myself about that any more, either."

"Then it comes to this: at present you're doing no good to two men and a helluva harm to one of 'em."

"Aren't you being a bit hard, Frank? One drifts into these muddles, without meaning. I looked on Darrell at the beginning just as a friend . . . like you or half a dozen others I had . . . well, perhaps I always knew he felt differently, but I just *had* to have his help through that bad time; he seemed glad enough to give it. And I honestly believed I was doing him a good turn in getting him this engagement. It has put him on his feet again professionally, you can't deny it."

"Don't talk to me as if I was a hanging judge, my dear. I can understand — God knows — how it all came about. But if I can read a man's face and manner at all, Darrell's had about as much

as he can stand of this Tantalus act. The next will be an explosion . . . perhaps a tragedy, when there might be . . . well . . . there might be salvation for the only ones who matter."

"How?"

"As I said before, it's for you to find out. Now let's close this debate, shall we? I ought to ask you to forgive me and all that, but I know I needn't." The chime on the riding-school cupola struck with leisurely music and they began to walk back towards the yard. By the steps they met Dussault limping briskly across from the house.

"Well, Madame," he asked, "has your horse arrived safe from London?"

"At last, Monsieur," said Georgy. "It's Patrico," she explained to Birlingham. "He only got over last night. It's been such a job settling it. First I had to stick them out at the Cirque d'Or over the contract, though Michel had the best of reasons for not being stingy. Then Harry wrote (he was looking after Patrico for me as a temporary job while Barlowe was in winter quarters) that he had lamed himself badly kicking the stable to bits one night; he got frightened, nobody knows just how, and that held him up. But he's here at last and glad to see me, the dear old man."

"Michel was curious to see him, it appears," put in Dussault.

"I should think so. Do you know why, M. Dussault?"

Dussault shook his head.

"I think my Patrico is the famous Aldebaran."

Dussault stopped abruptly. "What is that you say, — Aldebaran? It is madness."

"You knew Aldebaran, M. Dussault?"

"If I knew him! He was unique!"

"And have you seen Patrico?"

"Unhappily, no."

"Of course not. He was lame the night you came to Pentonville. But if he was Aldebaran, you would recognise him?"

"You can trust me, Madame."

"Then could I ask you to find time to come to the Cirque to-night and see him in the stables? It will settle the point."

"Willingly, Madame," Dussault pulled at his imperial. "But this is mysterious. Do you know the story about Aldebaran? . . .

But no, that is premature. Let me see the horse first. *C'est bien extraordinaire.*"

Birlingham had been listening only half-attentively. Suddenly he stopped, pointing with his stick to one of the bas-relief marble plaques let at intervals into the wall of the private circus. "Here you are again, Georgy!" he remarked.

It was the headless Amazon of Epidaurus.

"Do you see the resemblance, M. Dussault?" asked the clown. "Franklin made it the basis of his statuette, I believe."

"I've never seen the likeness," said Georgy, laughing; "there's so little left of her."

"But it is there," retorted the Frenchman, glancing swiftly from the marble to the living woman. "How is it that I failed to perceive it, I, who bought Mr. Franklin's statuette? Yes, Madame, you are the veritable Amazon of Epidaurus, alive, not broken!"

"Some day, I suppose, there will be as little left of me!"

"*Absit omen!*" murmured Birlingham, shuddering.

They entered the circus and their thoughts were drowned by the shrill scolding of the poet Regnault, the librettist of the equestrian pantomime, *Veuve Satan*, who was standing on the ring fence in his shirt sleeves, with his hair in a cockatoo crest and his eyeglass waving from its broad satin ribbon, denouncing two sullen clowns on the tan for their stupidity.

"*Oh, la-lal!*" murmured Dussault, "we must straighten out this or we shall have no performance at Easter."

2

"*C'est lui!* You have got Aldebaran," said Dussault, as he and Georgy walked away together from Patrico's stall that night. The stables at the Cirque d'Or were on an upper storey, running round the circular building, with staircases leading down to the dressing rooms, and a long slope of boards, with little transverse ridges to check slipping, for the descent and ascent of the beasts. They were still well-lit, for grooms were at work making their charges comfortable for the night, and one or two performers were lingering by the stalls of their own horses.

"How you have got Aldebaran I don't know," resumed Dus-



sault, going gingerly down the slope with his lame leg, for it was the shortest way to the entrance. "You shall tell me some time, if you will, Madame. That he should have come into your hands, at last, is the strangest coincidence. . . . Yes, I too can, perhaps, tell you something, though it is a story *bien triste, bien triste*, and not one I love to recall. I know now you are the daughter of George Dufay — stupid I was not to realise it before, for I met your father. Did he never speak to you of his acquaintance, Dudley Robertshaw?"

"Robertshaw again!" cried Georgy. "And you tell me now that my father knew him, and that it is a sad story. Oh, Monsieur, do explain the mystery. Ever since my father left us — you heard of that, perhaps? — I have had nothing but hints and suspicions. Was there some trouble in Paris, then, about this Robertshaw? If you know who the man was and what he can have been to my father, and how he came to own Patrico, I do beg you to tell me, tell me all you know."

"Not here, Madame, evidently," retorted Dussault tartly, as a bunch of grooms near the stage door stood aside to let them pass. "And there are difficulties in my telling anything. . . . In short, I must think it over. But do not, I entreat you, Madame, look so harassed," he added, as they came out on the pavement where his long blue car with the silver Pegasus mascot waited for him. "For if you are surrounded, as you say, by mystery, you have to-night cleared up one point and, *ma foi*, a very important one for you. You have Aldebaran —"

"M. Michel denies it."

"Naturally. He would not dare to offer for an act with Aldebaran what he offers for an act with the unknown Patrico. But you can force him."

"I'm a poor bargainer, I'm afraid, M. Dussault."

"But a good enough horsewoman — for this purpose at any rate. I will show you from my old press cuttings what Aldebaran could do and we will see if he can still be trained to do it. That done, the name is immaterial. Patrico may have as big a fame as Aldebaran."

Georgy's eyes shone. "Thank you, M. Dussault. I'll work to get all there is out of him, whoever he may be."

"Then not till Monday, eh? You have your matinée here to-morrow, *c'est dommage* —"

"And practice for Patrico in the morning. But I will be at rehearsal with you early on Monday."

"You are never late. Good-night, Madame."

The lights of his car flitted in wide fans up the street. Georgy paused, looking to see if there were a taxi on the small rank by the market. She thought she saw the lamps of one and was about to wave her gloves when an incomprehensible feeling of worry shot through her. She must have another look at Patrico. She took an irresolute step towards the door and checked herself. This was silly; she had taken a careful look round before she left the stall with Dussault. Patrico had his cloths on; he had had his feed. He was not ailing or in one of his nervous moods. "But I can't go without seeing him," said her other self. "It's terribly late," she chided with her reasonable part, "and Ivy sitting up for me." "But I sha'n't sleep," persisted the rival suggestion, "if I don't make sure." She told herself that she was getting nervy because she had just discovered the great value of the animal, but even while she did so, she was knocking on the door, which had just been closed for the night. It was opened at once by the white-haired night watchman who frowned at her with paternal rebuke. "Please, Armand, I must go in to see my horse; I forgot something."

"The lights are all out," said the old man, opening the door for her, nevertheless. "M. Michel absolutely forbids any electricity in the passages after one o'clock."

"But they leave lights in the stables all night?"

"A glimmer. And there is always, as Madame knows, the night groom on duty. So why need Madame worry?"

"The groom, Armand, is in his hutch, reading his paper or snoring. There are eighty horses up there and he cannot see more than a few yards around him. . . . Yes, I must go up at once."

"As you please. You have the right to visit your own horses at any hour of the twenty-four." The old man returned cheerfully to his cubbyhole, and Georgina groped her way down the passage till a faint glimmer of light from overhead showed that she had come to the foot of the sloping ascent. She made her way up as quickly as she could, stumbling over the ridges rather noisily

in the dark. At the top the great circular corridor loomed black and sinister: tiny globes like glowworms, kept burning always, shed pale patches of light at wide intervals, which made eerie caverns of the dark spaces between. There was no sound or sight of the groom on duty, who was probably drowsing in his hutch on the opposite side of the circle. For a moment, all seemed still; then with a hot throb of fear Georgy heard a sound. It was a repeated, hurried chinking, a horse jerking at the chain that tethered him by the manger. It came from her right hand, the direction in which Knight's and Patrico's stalls lay. She ran, with her heart beating, towards the sound, and soon made out the shape of Patrico in the dim light. There was a circular window of ground glass over his head, through which the rays of a high electric street standard filtered; and as she edged into the stall, carefully so as not to startle him, she saw his head tossing and jerking. Murmuring his name to quiet him, she laid a hand on his neck. It was thick in sweat that ran off between her fingers. Then, by the light from the street, she saw the white of his eye glaring at her and flecks of foam falling from his curled lips. She threw back the blanket and ran her hand along his back; the coat was matted with the same chilly sweat; she noticed now, for the first time, that he was trembling all over from his feet upwards, a sort of unending rhythmical shudder that bound him to his place. He was too much paralysed with terror to stir or kick: his only relief was that convulsive jerking on his chain.

It was impossible to see what had really happened in this bad light and Georgy looked round for the electric switches, only to recall that the lights were turned off at a main switch after one. She must rouse the groom and get him to unlock the switch cupboard. She was just making for the mouth of the stall, when she stopped dead, straining her ears. Away to her left, she heard, receding round the curve of the corridor, the *pad, pad* of light footsteps. Some one was running swiftly with long-legged strides, for the interval between the striking of each pace was marked. A sudden fury blazed up in her, banishing her first alarm. Some one had been in here, then, frightening Patrico! Some one had dared! Her cheeks burned as she leapt out of the stall and gave chase through the gloom after the footsteps. The great

curve opened up ceaselessly before her as she pursued, for the stables ran all round the outer rim of the auditorium dome; but she could not come in sight of the fleeing figure. Once she slackened pace to listen and there was the *thud . . . thud . . .* receding now more faintly before her. She called out as she darted past the night-groom's hutch where a light burned, but it seemed empty; and she went on with her fierce hunt, passed Patrico's stall again, and saw she had made a full circle without closing on her quarry. She ran some yards further and stopped in perplexity. Suddenly the steps broke out again, but this time behind her, running away in the opposite direction. He had doubled on her, lurking perhaps in an empty stall in the dark while she rushed past. She was going to turn about, when a better thought struck her, and she continued straight forward, hoping to come face to face with him round the curve. It was her handicap that the beat of her rather heavy monk shoes on the cement flooring drowned the light noise of the feet she was pursuing; and presently, still running on into nothingness, she stopped once more to take her bearings and heard absolute quiet in which her heart thumped. Had he stopped to lie in wait for her or found an exit from the circle? She began to creep forward cautiously, fearing some attack, and after a little way came to the head of a narrow staircase that plunged away into black depths. She peered fearfully over the rail, and felt with certainty: "He is at the bottom, down there!" But she dared not go down. She tried to force herself, but her feet were nailed. She dare not! Perspiration broke over her; she began to tremble, and with a loud cry wrenched herself away and fled towards the groom's hutch, praying that he might have returned to his post. The light still burned, but there was no sign of any inmate. Then Georgy, looking over the half door, saw the groom curled up comfortably in rugs on the boards, with a cushion for his head, breathing heavily. She shook him with indignant violence and he started up confused and sheepish. As soon as she made him understand what had happened, he sprang out of his coverings, alarmed for his job, and fumbled for the key of the switch cupboard. All this wasted time, and Georgy, beating an impatient foot on the floor, rated herself as a coward for abandoning the chase at the dark stairway.

Abruptly the lights flashed on all over the stable, and with them came the stirring and stamping of nearly a hundred horses roused from slumber. Georgy plucked at the groom's arm and hurried him towards the stair. On their way they were met by the old doorkeeper, who had hurried up at the sounds and the unexpected blaze of light. Georgy breathlessly explained, and, looking grim, the old soldier drew an automatic from his pocket. "*Ces Apaches!*" he murmured.

The three went cautiously down the staircase but found no one at any turning of it. At the foot a glass door led to a passage that ran past a group of dressing rooms. This was still in darkness, for the upstairs switch did not communicate with the lower floors. The doorkeeper, however, had a powerful electric torch, and with its aid they searched dressing rooms and corridors, and even crossed the vast, ghostly auditorium and shot their rays round the empty benches and boxes, without discovering any trace.

"*Personnel!*" said the old man at last.

"*Madame s'est endormie peut-être,*" murmured the night groom, scenting an escape from blame.

"Do you understand horses?" asked Georgy of the old doorkeeper bluntly.

"I should. Twenty years *maréchal des logis* in the Chasseurs d'Afrique, Madame," said the old soldier with a grin.

"Then come and look at mine. That will tell you if I have been dreaming. And I must go back to him, anyhow. Suppose the man we are hunting is up there all the time!"

They began to go back with speed, but as they passed along the corridor leading to the stair again, the doorkeeper stopped with an exclamation. "Look here, Madame! This is where he escaped."

The upper panes of the windows here, which opened in and downwards, were nailed for safety against burglars. One of them, however, had been prised open and bent back.

"Could a man get through that opening?" asked Georgy incredulous.

"An eel, perhaps," suggested the sulky groom.

"An active man certainly, Madame," replied the doorkeeper.

"I could have, when I was young and slim. And we have Apaches

these bad days that climb like cats. Yes, or like the cleverest acrobats we have!"

"But burglars don't steal horses through windows," protested Georgy.

The old man shrugged his shoulders. "There are many mysteries in the life of the circus, Madame. Have you enemies here?"

"I hope not!" cried Georgy.

"Well, let us see the horse," said the night watchman and they trooped upstairs again. Georgy found Patrico calmer now, though his coat was still matted with sweat and he still trembled, if less violently.

"I will stay with him till morning," said Georgy.

"I will save you that trouble, Madame," interposed the night groom effusively.

"You?" Georgy stared at him. "I have disturbed you enough, I am afraid. You had better go back to your pillow."

"She had you there, *mon garçon*," chuckled the old soldier, as the groom slunk away, muttering. "Asleep on guard, eh? They would have given us something for that in Algeria. You'll be lucky if you don't lose your place in this business, and you'd deserve it too."

He hobbled away downstairs, as Georgy dragged up a basket to Patrico's stall and, turning it up, sat down to begin her vigil. Yet sleep overtook her as the grey morning began to pale the electric light, and when she woke it was six and the grooms had arrived for their morning's work. Georgy, who had not been able to afford a man of her own, had made friends with the young French groom attached to the part of the stables where her horses were stalled, and knew she could trust in his skill and fidelity—in fact, he was helplessly in love with her. So, after telling him to be extra careful for the future, she found an early taxi and drove back to her Pension for a bath and a short sleep before she rehearsed at eleven-thirty.

3

She was too tired to be kept awake; but all through her breakfast and on the way back to the Cirque d'Or she was tormenting



her brain for some explanation of last night's mystery. Had she imagined the footsteps? She remembered a story she had read of a man who was pursued in the dark all night by the drips of a fountain in a circular corridor. But no, she had seen Patrico's state, the sweat, the trembling. And there was the open window. But what sort of man could be agile enough to writhe through that narrow opening? And why had he come and gone? To steal? But he had taken nothing. To harm Patrico? Why? And Patrico had not been harmed, though there had been plenty of time to do so before she had come stumbling up the slope to give warning.

Her head ached with perplexity and fatigue as she stooped in the dressing room to buckle the straps at the tops of her riding boots, and she took a dose of aspirin before getting into the light brown Holland jacket she wore for rehearsing. Then she came out bareheaded into the empty auditorium, which looked stuffy and tawdry in the soiled day of the frosted skylights, with its yellow plush stalls, its gold-fringed box curtains, its gilt statues holding out dead gold mirrors.

Her young groom was waiting a little anxiously in the ring, holding Patrico ready saddled; the hurdles were set in their places; and the groom, acting as deputy ringmaster in charge of the rehearsal, was chewing his moustache and eyeing his watch discontentedly. "*Vitel Vitel Madamel*" he cried with the veiled insolence of the jack-in-office. "We expected you at half-past eleven. It is now twelve, do you know? and there is a new act to rehearse unexpectedly before we start at two."

Georgy took not the least notice of him, as she gathered up the reins and looked Patrico carefully over. He seemed quite calm and there was no sign of sweating or shaking. "Any more trouble after I left?" she asked Pierre. "Not the least in the world, Madame," he replied, and stood aside as soon as she was up. He watched her for a moment and walked away.

Patrico gave no trouble as Georgy tried his paces round the ring before rehearsing his jumps; and, mechanically guiding him with hands and spur, she let her tired mind run back to her problems. The circus was ill ventilated and she felt oppressed, as though before a thunderstorm. Recovering her attention a little, she took Patrico over the hurdles round the edge of the ring. He

sailed smoothly over and again her thoughts wandered. There was no sound in the great dusty building but the dull trampling of his hoofs on the tan. Still with only half her mind on the work, and perhaps sitting a little loosely, she turned him inwards and set him at the high white bar in the centre. Then came an unnerving shock.

She was just bending forward to help him take off for the leap, when, instead of flying the bar with his usual ease, he checked himself dead with a single convulsive shudder, and, slithering wildly on rigid legs to a standstill, pitched her headlong, with both stirrups flying loose, over the pommel. For a moment, blinded by his mane in her eyes, she lay with her arms fast locked round his quivering neck, while a violent throb of giddiness dimmed her senses. Then, battling this faintness down by a fierce act of will, she recovered her seat and mastered the plunging horse.

As soon as her feet were home in her stirrups again, she looked round angrily for the cause of his panic. Beyond the jump, on the gold-topped fence of the ring, stood Joe Rixen. It was his abrupt emergence from one of the dark passages leading up into the stalls that had produced her discomfiture. Hot with humiliation, she spurred Patrico forward almost cruelly to confront him. The horse's whole body heaved with terror and he gave a piteous whinny as she forced him, sidelong and resistant, between her strong knees towards the acrobat. "How dare you come here to frighten my horse!" she cried shrilly, checking in front of him.

"Who frightened your horse, you novice?" taunted Rixen. "Why can't you manage him? I would, if he were mine."

His sneering face danced in a red haze before her; and overpowered by one of the rare rages in which her sullen father came out in her, she stood up in the stirrups and lashed out at him with her crop. She saw his teeth snarl, as he shot out an arm at the piebald. Patrico screamed and leapt with all four feet in the air. Astounded, Georgy felt her knees turn to water as he wriggled like jagged lightning from under her. The next moment, queerly dazed, she was lying unhorsed in the ring at Rixen's feet. A savage joy burned in his look, as he gazed at her long limbs stretched on the tan, her locks defiled with dust. Then a white

shape whirled suddenly between the two and invisible fetters seemed to be struck from her.

Scrambling to her feet, she saw Darrell Carless, ready dressed for the matinée in his long white Cossack coat, facing Rixen.

"Will you come for a stroll with me?" she heard him ask.

"With you, you ——? What in hell for?" enquired Rixen, stepping down into the ring.

"So that I can kill you," said Carless genially. "Or perhaps I'll leave you life enough to crawl back with; I haven't decided yet."

"You challenge *me*?" The acrobat thrust his vulturine face forward within an inch of Carless's.

"I'm trying to convey that much," answered Darrell. "Say, take that Aunt Sally a little further off, will you? 'Tisn't fair to shy from so close, but my fingers itch so's I can scarcely hold them."

Georgy was distracted by shouts from the groom in charge at the other edge of the ring. He had caught Patrico's bridle after her fall, but the piebald was rearing and pulling his arms out. She turned to run to the horse, but a sharp crack checked her. Whirling round, she saw Darrell stagger back and topple against the barrier of the ring. Rixen had struck him with full force in the mouth while they were still parleying. She was ready to rush in with her whip, but Darrell waved her back laughing. A rivulet of blood ran over his chin, but he was smiling delightedly and she saw the little black fires flickering in his eyes.

"You should wait for the gong, Uncle," he mocked, pacing lightly in upon Rixen, "but, if you're in such a hurry ——" He bounded on the pantomimist; cracked his left and right home on each side of the lean head and danced back with one of his white gloves split across the knuckles. "That's the postman, Uncle!" he scoffed.

The groom behind, still struggling with Patrico, gave a screech of protest, but Georgy did not stir. Rixen, with his right flung forward to guard his head, had swiftly raised his left hand to his eye and carried down something shining to his pocket. Then, as he rushed upon Darrell in a crouching but trained fighting position, he turned to her the long slab of a sightless left profile, puckered at the blind socket.

"The man with the false eye!" The words broke aloud from Georgy, as for the first time their true meaning flashed on her, binding in a blaze of mental vision the little gipsy boy . . . Patrico . . . Aldebaran . . . the dark corridor of last night . . . and a confused figure without feature, Robertshaw.

Neither combatant heard her cry. They had jolted into a close hold and swayed back and forward with grunts, till Carless, disengaging first, jabbed his right under Rixen's heart and the pantomimist sagged back, coughing. Carless sprang recklessly after him to finish, but had miscalculated the length of Rixen's spider-like arms. The pallid knuckles of his left crashed across Darrell's right eye and closed it; he dodged to Rixen's sightless side and for a minute the two half-blinded men gasped and smashed at each other with their fists in an unscientific frenzy.

Georgy quivered with an exultation that would have amazed her could she have watched herself. Darrell, whom she had always looked on as a boy and a comrade, shone like a god before her, and she could have rushed to embrace him in his blood and his bruises, but for the more savage rapture she felt at the blows he pelted on Rixen. But a torrent of oaths and cries from the groom at length wrenched her attention from the fight. "*Sacré nom d'une pipe!*" he howled. "*Venez donc, Madame. Votre cheval est fou! Cessez, Messieurs! Tonnerre de Dieu! Cessez! sacripants Anglais! Qu'en dira M. le Directeur?*"

She ran and caught Patrico's rein, calming him with her voice, but could not keep her eyes from the combatants. The groom, released, ran to part them by force, but arrived a second too late. Carless had fainted deftly from a furious left of Rixen's and the force of the blow swung the pantomimist over with his jaw exposed. Carless' right with the split glove shot up and struck the angle square. Rixen's head jerked back with an alarming click and he thudded down on the tan. "God!" said Carless. "Have I broken his neck?"

A few seconds' examination cleared his face. Rixen's strong and supple bones were not so brittle. He snored through a purple stain on his face; clutched at the tan with his thin, hairy fingers; then turned on his side with a groan.

"He'll do nicely," said Darrell, rising from his knees.

"I repor-r-r-t you!" bellowed the furious groom in his face.

"Say nothing about it," answered Georgy rapidly in French. "Boxing is an English sport, you know."

"*Le sport? Ah! oui! Par exemple!* Look at that one, then!"

Rixen had staggered to his feet and stood clenching and unclenching his hands, while his eye roved round the empty lines of seats.

"There are no loose chairs here, Uncle, nor bottles either!" said Darrell grimly, interpreting his thought. "Guess I can't ask you to shake, though I hate a scrap that ends this way."

Rixen muttered unintelligible words, and clambering slowly over the barrier, disappeared by the passage he had come through.

"You see, he is all right." Georgy turned to the groom. "I have a hundred francs in my dressing room—for a sportsman."

"*Bon!*" the groom smiled. "*Vive le sport toujours!* But he ——" he pointed to Darrell, "had better look to his eye, if he is to appear in an hour's time."

"Good Lord, yes! We must get that eye open, Darrell, somehow."

"Leave it to me, Georgy; there's a cold stone jar in my dressing room."

"You want raw steak. I say, don't let that lip dribble onto your white fur." She dabbed him with her handkerchief just in time. "Wasn't it gorgeous?" he murmured through her mopping.

"Heavenly, Darrell! You are a champion."

"But what had that slug got on you?" he asked. "And how did he bring you down?"

She looked round nervously. "Come to my room; I'll finish cleaning you up. It's getting late. Look, the grooms are coming in and the programme girls. Ah! thank Heaven, there's Pierre." She darted across. "Look after Patrico, Pierre, will you? Yes, we've had an upset. No, I'm not hurt, but Mr. Carless was kicked," she lied with alacrity. "Give Patrico a rub over, then I'll come to you. Now, Darrell."

She hurried in front of him to her dressing room, a new and better one that had been given her at Dussault's demand, near the entrance to the ring. "Sit down," she said, rummaging along a shelf. "You must rest a bit. Look! packet of fags on the dressing

table. But somewhere here I've the last scrapings of a tin of Barlowe's special. If I can find them, I'll guarantee you two eyes for your act this afternoon."

"I don't mind a fist in my face," said Darrell, "but I draw the line when it reeks of Jockey Club. That chap might keep a scent shop. . . . Pooh! . . . But what was it all about, Georgy? How did it begin?" He lit a cigarette and leaned back in the wicker chair a little stiffly.

"I didn't know Rixen was here at all," said Georgy, still hunting for the ointment.

"Oh, yes! I've seen his bills. Opens on Monday, I believe, a surprise engagement. But how did he tangle with you this morning?"

"He popped up like Punch, made Patrico refuse at the bar and had me nearly on the floor, first time. Ah! Here's the tin, thank goodness; not much left, but enough, I think. Hold your head up to the light. I'll be as gentle as I can." She worked away at the black puffed stain below his eye. "Then? Oh! Yes he did some devilry to the horse and there was spilt milk. Darrell, can't I ride . . . and can you see yet?"

"The answer is in the affirmative—to both, I think. Yes, it's glimmering; this stuff of yours *is* a balm, Georgy. It takes the smart out. But look here, I think I know what was wrong. Patrico was plumb mad with terror and he put his panic over onto you. You sort of lost yourself."

"Can that happen?"

"Easy. Did with me once rounding up some rustlers on patrol. There was a little gunplay and my horse, quite a colt, who'd never heard shooting before, round and bolted with me. I was so frightened, with *his* fear, mind you, not mine, that I couldn't even pull him for several seconds. But to come back to the point. . . . Yes, I will wash it now." He walked slowly over the room to her basin. "Why does Rixen have this effect on Patrico? His mug's ugly enough, I know, but horses don't go blind balmy on a point of art." He raised his face from the towel and looked at her with alert enquiry.

"Darrell, it means I've got a rope on Master Rixen. Yes! The terror of the horse, the glass eye . . . you noticed that, of course



. . . It was he who savaged Patrico, years back, when Patrico was Aldebaran, perhaps. . . . *He* was the footsteps last night and the eel . . .”

“Georgy, I can’t follow a blessed word. . . .”

“No, not yet; of course you can’t, and I can’t explain yet either. I’ve still a long way to go too. But perhaps Dussault will help, and we’ll get Dad back at the end. Yes, I’ve got a rope on him, now! Oh! I’m glad it happened.”

“Well,” he had finished his toilet and stood up shining in his long white coat with only the red cut on his lip and the fading black stain below his eye as relics of the fight. “I felt pretty bad when I saw you crash. You seemed quite helpless and I—I thought for an instant he had killed you. But I’m glad it happened too, now.”

“I was a rabbit, wasn’t I? I’ve always been a rabbit before Joe Rixen; but no more, no, never any more!”

“How your eyes shine. . . . Yes, I can see that all right. I take it you’re happy because you feel you’ve something to hold over Rixen in case he harries you any more ——”

“No, Darrell. Oh! Darrell, you’re thick-headed to-day, aren’t you?”

She came so close to him that her toe touched his foot and laid a hand on the fur trimming of his long tunic. “It’s you that’s freed me. . . . You’ve been wondering, I expect, if I’d ever thank you, but I’ve been trying to find the words, any words, and I can’t, because it’s all swelling here,” she pressed her hands over her bosom and her breath came short, “all so sweet. . . .”

He recoiled with a haggard expression. “Georgy, for God’s sake, be careful what you say. I’m trying to run straight, heavens hard, but I’m only flesh. I can’t stand everything. Don’t look at me like that, girl, d’you hear? I tell you not to.”

“Darrell,” she breathed, “Darrell! Darrell! Oh, I love even your name, Darrell! Can’t you see what you’ve done to me, my dear? There was a girl here, alone, stumbling along in the dark, frightened; but now no more. She’s gone, poor little crittur. What would she do in this new world you’ve made? Darrell, isn’t your heart bubbling over too?”

“Georgy!” Joy and anguish rang together in his voice as he

pulled her to him. His clasp on her body hurt like iron; but she only bent back, swaying with her spurred heels off the floor, to find his mouth. A river of flame poured through her and lapped her round; then sank away, leaving each limb refreshed and strengthened. Breast tight to breast they stood a long minute, feeling each other's breathing. The cold sunlight filled the bare room with misty rays; the keen scent of the tan on the passage to the ring penetrated it; and a horse's heavy stamp sounded outside. Then a voice came shrilling along the passage. "*Carless! Carless! La piste attend!*"

"Run, darling!" she said. He left her smiling to him in the pale gold haze.

4

The afternoon passed for Georgy in a sparkling trance, and she strove to keep her mind passive, fearing that once she let her thoughts run back to realities, the dream would vanish. The sunshine in the dressing rooms and passages was celestial; the arena lights took on a royal brilliance; the audience seemed a collection of lovers she would have been glad to gather in her arms. She could not pass any one behind the scenes without a smile or a joke. From time to time the edge of a shadow moved on the horizon of her mind — Otto, Pansy, echoes of moral warnings uttered in her mother's voice, the lascivious leer that would run round this circus world, to-day so bright and lovable, if it became known that she had at last after all her severity, "done like others." But she would not grapple with the future yet. The dismal perplexities, dismal conflict that lay before her, must wait, just for this afternoon. Her hour or two of heaven, surely, no fate could grudge.

Crossing from the stables to her dressing room when her act was done, she ran into a slim girl in white tarlatan ballet skirts who was being jostled by grooms carrying iron fencings for a wild-beast act. "Eth Vaughan!" she cried gaily, catching both her hands. "Haven't seen you for ages, my dear! How are you? How's it all going?"

"Why, Georgy!" said the girl, a dark-eyed, fugitive creature,

with a soft voice like a wind sighing. "I shouldn't have known you, you've changed so!"

"Getting an old, stout woman, eh, Ethel?"

"I don't mean that." Ethel never smiled. "You seem so big *inside*." Her childish eyes were puzzled for expression. "But, of course, you're a big star now, an't you, Georgy?"

"Oh, carrying on," said Georgy lightly. "What are you dressed for? I thought your lot opened next week."

"No, to-night. Ought to have this afternoon, if Joe hadn't been ——" A look of terror filled the dark, vague eyes. "Georgy, an't you frightened of what you've done? He means to make trouble. You know what he's like, if any one gets across him — the way you have."

"If it was I that had got across him I might be frightened; he's very bold, knocking women about — I've heard a thing or two. But you see, Eth, some one else handled him this morning, and I think he'll lie low for a while."

"Don't you believe it, Georgy," sighed Ethel, in her plaintive whisper. "He's very bad, knocked about something fearful, he says."

"And can work to-night? But for luck I might have been carried out unable to work for weeks. He got off lightly, and anyhow, I'm not afraid of him any longer; you can tell him so, Ethel."

"You know I couldn't do a thing like that. I must go; he's rehearsing us upstairs, and I reckon the break's over. Good-bye . . . Georgy . . ." she paused, dragging out the words as if anxious to say something more; then turned and flitted away.

"Poor little crittur," sighed Georgy. "What a time she must have." She thought of the brutalized muzzle of Seth Rixen, the low forehead and shifting eyes of Ethel's handsome brother, Walter, and the perpetual over-clouding presence of Joe. "I believe old Alf was fatherly to her in his way," she mused. "The others . . . O God! Life's cruel to some of us!"

She returned to her room, where on *matinée* days a waiter from a café down the street brought her coffee and crescents in the interval between the two shows. She wondered, as she took up the coffeepot, whether Darrell would come to see her before the

evening performance, but she felt somehow sure he would not. In spite of his half-military brusqueness in ordinary dealings, there was a boyish shyness and delicacy in his way of loving. He would feel bound to leave the next step to her; he would shrink from taking advantage of what might have been a wave of impulse in her shaken and excited condition. He would wait for her to send for him . . . yes . . . that was all to the good . . . time to think.

She lit a cigarette and leaned back on the hard, striped sofa of her dressing room. How strange that she had the game in her hands like this! She relied on Darrell; he and he alone had delivered her from the terror of Joe Rixen; she had let him fight for her as if she had been one of the shrinking maidens in the old storybooks she used to finger at school. He was the stronger, formidable to her enemies — yes, and to her also. She would not like to face his rage, which, nevertheless, she knew, he would never turn against her. "He'd let me treat him *anyhow*," she mused. And he had left it to her to pull down the barriers between them. "Barriers he doesn't believe in, but knew I did. Do I?" She sighed. Again she saw the figures of her husband and her child and summoned up her wits and resolution to decide. But she seemed to slip out of her own grasp. The wave of sweetness swept over her again; she let her eyes close; the end of her cigarette dropped from her strong white fingers on to the floor. Again she floated away, breathing deeply, on her sea of happiness, cool now and touched with evening calm.

And she had decided nothing, but was still wrapped in her delight, when she mounted Knight at the foot of the slope from the stables and rode slowly along the corridor to wait for her entry in the evening show. A limelight act was going on in the ring and the corridor was darkened too, lest any ray should pierce the curtains.

Suddenly a figure stirred out of the shadow and moved to her horse's side. By the glowworm lamps that still kept a glimmer in the corridor, Georgy, without a tremor, recognised Joe Rixen. He was skilfully made up with the skull-like head he wore for his nocturnal pantomime, a complicated adjustment of false features and paint, which left the play of expression that a mere mask

would have quenched. She saw his face clearly in the ray of a bulb by his ear; and, practised as she was to read through make-up, noticed the places where the white paint swelled and smeared over the raised bruises, as well as the sunken wrinkles round the cheek bones and the grey hair plastered on the temples. "An old man!" she thought, almost with pity, as she gazed down at him from the saddle.

Unexpectedly he laid a hand on Knight's bridle, and the horse recoiled, stamping an offended hoof. Georgy's mood changed at the indignity to her comrade. "Take your hand off my reins, Joe Rixen," she said, leaning forward through the shadow, "or I'll smash your knuckles with my crop!"

Rixen dropped his lank hand from Knight's head. "Don't be so vicious, Georgy," he whined. "I wasn't doing any harm. *Why* need you be so vicious?"

Georgy eyed him in silence. After a pause he went on, "I came, Georgy, to do a jolly kind thing, in the circs. To say that I don't bear any malice to *you* because your young friend hit me that foul blow this morning, the ——"

"You were hit no foul blow, Joe Rixen. He knocked you out as squarely as if there'd been a referee keeping the ring. You struck the only foul; so there!"

"Well, I didn't harm *you* at all events."

"Tried your best to make Patrico kill me, that's all."

"Chaw! How was I to guess you'd fall off like a beginner if he shied? . . . Now don't get vicious." He stepped back, guarding his head, as he saw her grip her crop. "I want us two to be friends . . . Oh! You needn't snort. I've always been very fond of you, Georgy. I know that a gal without mother or father has a hard time, and I've always felt very tender towards you. Knew you when you were a long-legged flapper, don't forget! Can't we be friends again like we used to? Where's your hand?"

He reached up long-nailed, tremulous fingers ingratiatingly. A pungent smell of scent came to her nostrils as she stared without moving between Knight's ears.

"Well, if you're still sulky, I can't help it." His whine rasped into a snarl. "But remember, the malice don't come from my side. Your young bruiser, I'll remember; oh, yes, don't let him

think not! But I can get back on a man without injuring his girl."

"If there were no other reason," said Georgy suddenly, "for my loathing and despising you, Joe Rixen, it would be enough that I now know how you treated Patrico before I had him."

Watching him, she was sure he gave a sudden start, immediately controlled.

"Oh, so that's it? I thought there was something behind it all; you're not usually one to have grouches," he said in level, amused tones. "But, Georgy, you're making a crazy mistake. What put it in your head that I ever set eyes on that great piebald of yours before?"

"Why does he obey your orders?"

"Every horse does that," boasted Rixen. "I'd like to see the one that didn't. I'd show him who was his master."

"Perhaps you'd steal up like a thief by night to visit him in his stable," she suggested.

There was a pause and she thought she saw his yellow eye narrow a little. "I don't know what blasted rot you're talking now," he said at length. "Why should I want to look at your ugly brute, by night or by day?"

"That you know best; but I'll find out some time."

"If you think I knew the horse before, where was it and when? Tell me that . . ." He paused. "Ah! You see, you haven't a scrap of evidence," he jeered.

"The man with the false eye," she quoted.

"Who told you that?" he jumped. "Oh! of course, you saw this morning. You don't call that proof, do you?"

"I'll get proof enough before I've done. And then, Mr. Joe Rixen, I'll make you pay. You won't find another window to crawl through, I promise you."

"Listen, Miss Georgina Dufay . . . curse the beast!" He had made another snatch at Knight's bridle and the horse had plunged to the side of the passage, whitening his rider's boot against the wall. "Listen, you," he went on, savagely, as she stooped over Knight's neck, soothing him. "You've got two ideas in that damned obstinate head of yours that you've got to hold apart — Joe Rixen and the horse Patrico. They don't know each other — remember that, for your health. You think now, p'raps, that because you've



got that ex-copper behind you — pretty goings on for a woman of virtue! I wonder what your pore husband thinks of 'em? — you can double-cross me! Well, you'll see how much your Mr. Carless is worth soon enough, and whether he's anything to lean on. If you won't take that warning, and *let me alone*," he shot out the last words with the exasperation of a hunted man, a fury that surprised her, "what follows'll be only what you're asking for." His voice sank suddenly, became curiously low and reflective. "I have such strange dreams sometimes, Georgy. . . . One of 'em is when I see you falling . . . falling . . . lying broken, and you don't get up again, like you did this morning." His teeth chattered. "A ghastly dream — I hope it won't ever come true."

She had never felt more sure of his craziness than as he spoke these last words, his single eye turned inwards and hollowing till it seemed to fade into the socket of the skull that disguised him. Death grinned at her through the gloom; she smelt for a moment the mould thrown back from her mother's grave. Then abruptly the lights flashed on in the arena and the corridor; the ringmaster beckoned to her through the curtains; and, as she rode out into the dazzle of the arc lamps and the rattle of the applauding *claque*, she caught a glimpse of an old man grotesquely disfigured with bits of pasteboard and putty, limping stiffly away with hunched shoulders and muttering lips.

5

And she thought no more of Rixen or his threats that evening. When she got back to her room after her act, she found on the table a bunch of Parma violets, mixed with fragile sprays of lily-of-the-valley, wrapped in silver paper. She stood for a moment caressing them with her fingers and softly kissing them, her eyes a little misty at the reticence and self-suppression of her lover. To-night, even if it meant not sleeping a moment, she must wrestle out the problem; she had done enough delicious drifting and must face the hard facts, the sordid facts, perhaps, that awaited her. To-morrow she would tell him what they must do; though, as she leaned back in her taxi watching the lights flit past, she could not imagine how she could ever decide.

She passed through the hall of the little hotel; there were no letters, she was glad of that. She looked into the little sitting room, calling "Ivy!" It was dark. She pushed open the folding doors into the bedroom and stopped short.

Her husband was sitting by the baby's cot.

"Well, Chorche," he said, with a rueful, hesitating smile.

She stared at him in bewilderment and the little bunch of flowers, breaking from its wrapping, fell on the floor. He picked them up. "Nice flowers!" he said in a propitiatory tone. She looked at them with a stunned expression, then laid them aside gently on the table.

"How did you come here, Otto?" she asked in a low voice, so as not to wake Pansy.

He spread out his hands desperately. "It was the only thing left to do, wort of honour, Chorche; don't be cross."

"What have you done with the elephants?"

"Sold them, Chorche."

"Sold them — all?"

"Not all; you see, Maharanee died; that was the beginning. What could I do with the two little ones, alone? So Jamrach made an offer."

"But how did Maharanee die? She couldn't die — Don't lie to me, Otto!"

Fear crept into his china-blue eyes at the subdued ferocity of her tone. "It's all true, Chorche, efery wort," he protested. "Maharanee scratched her foot on a rusty nail in the floor of her stable, at Hammersmith. It got poisoned: we only realised too late. We had to shoot her."

"You didn't realise! You wouldn't! What was Fritz about, not to report to you?" she asked furiously, forced into sudden intense interest in his affairs instead of her own absorbing ones.

"Oh, Fritz! But he had ron away long before. Where to? I don't know. Back to Hamburg, I should think."

"He couldn't stand it, I suppose. Poor boy, I can't be angry with him."

He broke in quickly on what seemed her softened mood.

"So you see, Chorche, I could do nothing. I can't earn money with no animals. And then there were tradesmen worrying me,

— a wine merchant. So I had to come to you, for a bit, just to let things blow over; you can do something for me perhaps.”

He still had his winter Astrakhan coat on, with the fur trimmings worn and bald in spots. He loosed it now, heated by the perspiration of his nervousness; plunged his hand in a pocket for his cigarette case, and brought out one of his own gloves and another of silk, obviously a woman's, which he whipped back, darting a glance up to see if she noticed.

She sighed and took her hat off. “Have you had any food?” she asked.

“No. I didn't like to order anything here, without asking you. I'm not hungry, Chorche. I have my little flask filled.”

He pulled it out and she checked him. “Don't start drinking brandy without any supper,” she said. “I've something in the cupboard in the other room. Only a little cold meat.”

“Oh, but that will be nice, Chorche.”

She passed into the sitting room and began to lay a cloth; what she wanted was to gain time to think. This development seemed to make her task impossible: she felt crushed between two weights: how could she think clearly now?

“Chorche!” His voice came softly through the doors. “Haf you looked at Pansy. I don't think she's well.”

Georgy hurried back through the doors. “Don't disturb her when she's asleep,” she warned him in an angry whisper.

“No, but only look!” His voice was genuinely anxious. “Isn't she flushed?” Georgy stooped over the cot. It was true. The child was hot when she felt her small hands and her breath was jerking. “Do you think she's going to be ill?” asked Otto in a hoarse murmur.

“She does look a little feverish,” answered Georgy anxiously. “I've seen her like it before, since we've been here. Paris doesn't suit her. I'll fetch a doctor in the morning if she's not better. But let her sleep. It may be nothing much. Come into the next room. I'll leave the door ajar.”

They tiptoed out into the sitting room, where Georgy went on with her preparations for his supper.

“It would be an awful thing,” said Otto, “if Pansy were to haf a serious illness.”

"Can't you trust me to take care of her?" asked Georgy harshly.

"Of course, I do. She is a lucky child. You are an exceptionally good mother, exceptionally."

"No better than ordinary," sighed Georgy, as she put the cruet on the table. "Have you ever met a bad mother in the circus?"

"Not as a rule, no. They are good women. And, of course, our children are our prosperity."

"What do you mean?"

"It is odd if they don't inherit some of our gifts. And when they are trained, it is all in our pockets, eh? Pansy may be fine rider too, or acrobat some day."

"And so we ought to look after her, like a valuable animal, for our profit. Is that your idea?"

"Oh! Chorche! You know it's not. You know how I am fond of the lovely little angel. *That* is why I am glad she has a good mother. I have seen mothers run away and leave their children for some infatuation. *Schrecklich!* The poor little ones. Perhaps they have a father who will be good to them; perhaps not. Some I have seen, ragged, neglected, and I have been so sorry . . . so very sorry."

Georgy, who knew that his love of children was genuine, was a little touched. She sat watching him in silence, as he fell to hungrily on the scanty, unappetizing supper which was all she was able to scrape together for him. She wondered when he had eaten last, how he had been living lately. His penurious state showed more clearly in the stronger light of the sitting room. His collar was not clean, one cuff was frayed into a fringe, there were cracks across the patent leather of his boots.

She felt both softened and disgusted. It was terrible how he depended on her for everything now. "I'm afraid, Otto," she said, "this is a poor meal for you."

"No, Chorche, it is all very nice, very nice. There is no more cheese? Nefer mind. Could you spare one cigarette? My case is empty."

She tossed a packet over. "Otto," she asked abruptly. "If I died, I wonder what on earth would happen to Pansy — and to you, for that matter?"

"But, Chorche, you're not going to die! Are you ill?" he asked sharply.

"In our business, Otto, nearly every one is in danger of death at any time. A rotten rope, a frightened horse. Remember Emilie Loisset . . . and half a dozen you and I have known."

"You are fery morbid to-night, my dear Chorche. Haf you had some fright?"

She was staring gloomily at the floor. Rixen's death's-head grinned at her again and in a spasm of desperation she felt that there would be the only way out.

"My dear Chorche!" He had come over softly and put an arm round her shoulder. "If you did haf an accident or something horrible (but don't let's think of such things) of course, I should gif up my life to Pansy. But it would not be the same for her. I know, Chorche, I am not a goot father . . . nor a goot husband, you say. I know it, I know it. I haf tried to be kind and I haf loved, I do love you, Chorche, but I know there is something weak in me. I'm not worthy really of hafing married you. Don't start to cry, Chorche. I feel so bad to-night, you will make me break down, if you do."

The tears fell silently over her face. "You're honest about it, Otto, that's something."

"And now, Chorche, I shall try to do better," he broke in hastily. "You haf been an angel to me and I haf been a brute. I think efery woman in the world would haf left me, but you. But you, Chorche, I think you haf the goot Gott in you. I thought it when I looked at you in the church the day we were married. Do you efer think of that now, Chorche, that fonny little priest? It is a lucky thing for us wretched fellows that there are women like you who will nefer let us down, once they haf promised, howefer badly we do our part."

"I wonder what would become of you, Otto, alone?"

"I should go to *der Teufel*: starf—I don't know. But thank God, Chorche, I don't haf to think of such things. You are strong and haf good nerfs; there will nothing happen to you. And so, our little Pansy is safe too."

To turn the subject, Georgy questioned him a little about his plans. He was vague and evasive, and she felt that his working

days, too, were done, at any rate in his own mind. It was as though the burden of keeping those who could or would not help themselves, which she had cheerfully taken up in her mother's case, was being thrust upon her again. There was an alarming undercurrent of debt too, in his talk; and she realised that, whether or no she was liable for his obligations (she knew no law on these points), the fact that she had always made herself responsible would morally bind her now.

At length, leaden fatigue, weighted by last night's vigil and the physical and emotional shocks of this long day, bowed her head over the table as she tried to answer Otto's babbling. He saw her state and rose with a playful chuckle.

"The Dustman has come, I see. It is a long time, Chorche, since we haf welcomed him together." He yawned profoundly. "I am tired too, an uncomfortable journey; but I'm easier in my mind now." He crossed to the bedroom and peeped in with a proprietorial air. "It is a small bed, Chorche, but we're too sleepy to mind that, eh?"

She sprang up with flaming cheeks. "I'm not sleeping with you, Otto!"

He looked bewildered. "But, why not? What is wrong? Are you angry, Chorche? I thought you had forgiven my coming so suddenly on you. I thought you wanted to be nice to me; I haf had trouble enough these last weeks, Gott knows!"

"I'll explain nothing, Otto, to-night. But we shall sleep apart. You take the bed. I'll shake down on the sofa here."

He seemed resigned. "You take the bed then. Yes, you must be in there, with Pansy. If she wakes, you will be nearer."

"Very well then. It matters little to me. Take this blanket and I'll unstrap my travelling rug for you. Did you bring no luggage at all?"

"It's with my landlort at Hammersmith," he confessed. "I had to borrow all I could from frients for the crossing. We — you — must please send him a little cheque, to-morrow."

She made up the couch as best she could for him and retired into the bedroom. Presently, as she shut the doors, she remembered that there was no key to lock them. "But, it'll be all right,"



she thought; "he's tired out and he's not drunk, thank God!"

She inspected Pansy again before undressing and was worried by the feverish scowl on her face. Her beautiful mouth was open and distorted. "I must have a Doctor, first thing in the morning," thought her mother; then, dropping her clothes off, she fell across the bed and had not even energy to pull the blankets over her before sinking into thick slumber.

It was a dreamless sleep from which she awoke, chilled, in the earliest twilight to hear some one moving in the room. Terror seized her; she drew her legs swiftly up on to the bed and crouched in the corner against the wall, like a cat ready to strike.

There was silence, as she tried to pierce the shadows. Then she saw her husband's head moving against the thin blind.

"Otto!" she called. "Is that you? How dare you, after what I said?"

He turned round, putting a finger to his lips, and now, as she grew used to the dimness, she saw that he was sitting on a little low chair beside Pansy's cot. "Ssh! Don't wake her, Chorche!" he whispered. "She's been bad. She woke crying and she was offully sick."

Georgy sprang off the bed. "You should have waked me! I didn't hear her cry."

"No! That's why I came in. I could see you were dead beat, so I did what I could for her. I think she is better; the sickness relieved her. I nursed her and when I could see she was asleep put her back to bed."

"When was this?"

"About two — I heard a clock strike."

Georgy peered at her wrist watch with the illuminated dial. "Half-past five. You've been sitting up a long while, Otto. You go back to bed now and I'll stay with her."

"No! No! It is all right! You are tired out, I can see. I can haf sleep in the daytime; you can't. I'll wake you if she is taken bad again."

She looked at him in the brightening light. His face, still grimy from travel, was wan and lined with fatigue, but there was a soft light in the blue eyes, that so often stared like shallow china plates,

and his mouth quivered with a deprecating air that seemed to plead, "After all, I am good for something."

"Thank you, my dear," she said gently, and turned her head to the wall again.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### I

GEORGY again felt that delicious breaking of all her bonds as Darrell's knock fell on the door of her room at the circus, in answer to the message she had sent him.

"Come in!" she cried, her sufferings drowned in joy. "Oh! Darrell, I thought I'd never see you again."

"A whole twenty-four hours' absence!" he laughed. "But I can live on remembering you—for just that time. Then I want fresh supplies——"

He had her in his arms and again she felt that surge of life and power, before which all her scruples, worries and obligations dwindled to little specks. A tiny figure, her husband, in his frayed, greasy overcoat; the baby, an indistinguishable mite in a toy cot; Ivy a faint little wraith. Then a sharp needle pierced through her rapture and she struggled away from his clasp and his kisses. "Don't, Darrell! Oh, don't!" she sobbed.

He released her with an anxious face. "What's the matter, Georgy? Have I done wrong? Offended you?"

"You couldn't do wrong, Darrell! Only . . . you must listen. . . . I'm at my wits' end. I can't carry the burden any longer."

"What burden?" He gazed at her darkened eyes and haggard cheeks with as much anguish as if he saw her dead. "Georgy, you mustn't get like this. There's two of us to face this business out, aren't there? You can be brave, I know!"

"Darrell, my husband arrived in Paris last night!"

He frowned. "That complicates it. Not really, though." His face cleared again. "It means you've got to take your hurdle without time to look over and about. But it means going straight, thank the Lord!"

"But Darrell, it's not so easy. There isn't only Otto; there's Pansy."

"Yes! I know!" He looked grave and a little drawn. "That's the big cliff in the way, that tiny thing. That's what clutches you — and me."

"But you still don't know. Pansy's ill, desperately. They've taken her to the children's hospital. The doctor suspects typhoid."

"Does he? My God! Georgy, how fearful for you. Poor little kid. But perhaps it's not so bad. He only suspects, you say?"

"And there's Dussault clamouring for extra rehearsals: he wrote this morning. And Michel won't pay me to stop off and nurse my baby. I shall go mad, Darrell!"

He seized her wrist. "Grip the leather, Georgy! We'll take this bit by bit. Pansy's ill — that's *all* that matters for just now. When the poor kid's well again — and she will be, Georgy, grip on to that too — we'll think of ourselves. You can't stop off here, because you need the money more than ever, and you can't let down Dussault because you're bound to him. That's where you've got to show harder grit than even you've ever done before. Say, is Riegelmann bothering you? Do you want me to get him away?"

"Oh, no, no: he loves Pansy, I think, as much as I do. He's been decent for once. Oh! Darrell, I haven't the heart —"

"Georgy, just one word." He laid his hand upon her sleeve, speaking very gravely. "You say, you haven't the heart . . . I think I can guess what to do . . . or not to do. But, my dear, you've got to find the *mind*, haven't you, to think straight and to act straight afterwards."

"A woman can't act straight, placed as I am!" she cried.

"That's not true. You can act straight still, but the straight road won't stay open much longer."

"No, that's why I'm so terrified. Oh, I can't tell you how I feel, Darrell. Apart from everything else — all my side of it — and Otto — it's too late. I've treated you — vilely, Darrell."

"Georgy, don't rave like this. It's below you. You've only given me one right — to ask you for a straight decision. Am I such a child, such a fool as to think that all rights, claims, barriers vanished because we fell into one another's arms yesterday? You couldn't help it, nor could I — and I don't, I can't be sorry for it.

But, you understand, there's no having it both ways. Secrecy, trickery, a drunken cuckold and a slinking lover, they don't become a girl as clear as you; and I — well — I've my honour too."

"I know what you want, Darrell, but I can't answer you yet; I can't indeed."

"Well, this poor child's illness makes a sort of a truce of God, doesn't it? I'll say that till Pansy's out of danger you're the wife of Otto Riegelmann, and I'll treat you as such. Then, Georgy, you'll tell me what you mean to be — and we'll end this mess. I certainly won't hang about after you any longer like a hungry cur; I've done too much of it already for my self-respect."

"But Darrell, you wouldn't go —"

"With you or without. That's as sure as the everlasting hills."

With dry staring eyes, too wrung even to cry, she gazed at the window, at the door, all round the room, as if seeking escape. As he stood watching, he ached to gather her into his arms and smooth out the lines of pain on her candid brows. But she must go through the fire alone. He could not help her yet — if ever.

2

The next ten days were to Georgy a nightmare whirl. From the hospital she would drive at full speed across Paris to a rehearsal at Dussault's, which the ill temper and ever-shifting directions of the poet Regnault made a purgatory in itself; thence to the costumier appointed by Dussault; then back to the hospital till the nurses warned her that visitors must leave and her watch showed that she had only time to dress for her night's work at the Cirque d'Or. The next day the steeplechase recommenced.

There was little time in all this for thought of her future steps. Sometimes at night, too harried in nerve and limb for sleep, she lay and ached for Darrell, for him to take her out of it all and drown her anxieties, doubts, remorse in a flood of free life somewhere in the open, away from the grease paint, the stuffy arena, the little harassments of her rudimentary housekeeping at the Pension Maugras. But could she by any device carry off Pansy with her? And if not, how could she go without her? The helpless thing that clasped tiny hands round her long forefinger when she

leaned over the cot, that looked up, appealing confidently to her to take away the pain on bad evenings, that smiled palely, grasping at her short tumbling curls when she picked it up on mornings of improvement. It was such a grave baby, already showing by the deep velvety eyes with which it had earned its name, and by the first tendrils of dark hair on its wide pink head, that it intended in quiet wilfulness to skip both parents and to pattern after its Italian grandmother. Crying little, never enraged, laughing rarely (and that only when well) with an inward gurgle, like the trickle of a tiny current round small stones, Pansy seemed already fit to sit in judgment on a deserter. Sometimes in a stab of unbearable anguish Georgy would see her as she would be, if abandoned: alone, quite quiet, but understanding, condemning.

It helped her little to make up her mind that Otto during the days of worst alarm acted as a model husband, as regular at the hospital as she was, asking nothing for himself, attentive to any commission for the child's health, never drunk, never lost, never in trouble.

The days sped, swift for all their pain. Under Dussault's masterful hand the equestrian pantomime began to grow into unity and order; even Regnault had grumbled himself into acquiescence by the first dress rehearsal. And Georgy, who knew that in her distracted state she had neither settled into her part in *Veuve Satan* nor polished, as Dussault had a right to expect, her *haute école* act on Ruy Blas, began to bend her mind to the work when Pansy took a swift turn for the better, the doctor declaring that she was now out of danger. But with this relief the figure of Darrell and his claims sprang up before her with renewed, almost overpowering, fierceness. She knew that he had meant quite literally what he had said at their last talk. His contract was terminable on a week's notice; in a few days now he would end it and disappear for good if she did not choose him. And what an existence then stretched before her! Already Otto was slipping back after the revulsion from the crisis. He was reverting to his sullen moods, drinking heavily again; and he had formed a habit now of sitting watching her, his shallow blue eyes narrowed by a curious blend of fear and suspicion. Evidently he had some grievance that he would



fling at her but for his sense of depending on her for food and shelter. It sickened her that a man could be so debased; and, with surprise at the audacity of her own thought, she found herself questioning the bond that chained them together for their mutual degradation, making each by a grim necessity both bully and coward in dealing with the other. "It would be better not to live," she thought, "than to live in this vile way."

But what, she went on to ask herself, did he suspect, and how did he come to doubt and fear her at all? Since his arrival she had hardly seen Darrell — the truce had held — some one must have told him of things before his coming. But who could have done that and who had known that she and Darrell loved?

Otto at any rate knew now: she was convinced of that by his outburst when she told him she had consulted the doctor about sending Pansy, when she left the hospital, to the seaside for convalescence. He had obviously been drinking a lot that morning, for he was shaky, livid-looking and his voice squeaked. "It is a damnt impertinence, do you hear me, Chorche?" he shrilled at her. "You treat me as if I did simply not exist at all. Am I not the father? Is it not my child? I will haf my way; I will not haf my child stolen from me, that I haf worked for and so much lofed." He picked up a chair by its back with shaking hands; dropped it with a sputtered curse, then snatched a vase from the mantel-piece and flung it into the grate. "I will not be so insulted, a husband and a father!" he shrieked.

"Nobody's doing anything with Pansy yet," answered Georgy, in a stinging voice. "When I've settled, you'll be told. Put that plate down at once. If you throw it, I'll lock you out of these rooms."

He lurched to the table at which she was sitting and thumped on it with his fat fists. "You're a pretty wife for a man to haf, aren't you?" he screamed. "I thought your mother had brought you up a goot girl."

She stood up, very pale. "You're not the husband to use those words to any wife," she told him. "But if you've something in your mind, say it out. I'll answer you!"

He recoiled, and again that mingled dread and cunning stole

into his face. "I won't be made a fool of, that is all," he mumbled. "I am man of honour, like all my people. And my child, she is mine. I will not be robbed of her, either."

Georgy turned away from him and put on her coat. "I'm going round to the hospital," she told him; "*alone*," she added fiercely, as he seized his soiled velours hat. "Otto, if you come spying after me, you'll be sorry all your days."

She left him twisting his hat in his fingers and glowering after her.

3

Dussault held his last dress rehearsal on the Friday after Easter; the performance was to be given on the Sunday night. Saturday would be mostly occupied for Georgy, as for several other members of his composite company, by the usual two shows at the Cirque d'Or. But she could keep the morning free, and she sent a note to Darrell, begging him to meet her in the Bois by the lake. By herself, she knew, she had failed to find her way, and her only hope now was that he might see more clearly, will more firmly.

The mists still clung about the water as they met in a solitude that might have been miles from Paris. A motor horn from time to time hooted faintly from beyond the wooded island where a main alley, crowded in the afternoon, ran through the park; and once the small figures of a pair of riders, a man with a woman in a light grey habit, rocked past between pale green trees on a distant horse track. But by the borders of the lake they met only a solitary Guardian in uniform, pacing slowly by with his stick held under his arm, and heard only the laughter of a group of children who were playing with shuttlecocks round and under a plane tree. The blue deepened overhead, hollowing out the sky as it displaced the grey morning clouds, and the sun, striving eagerly to pierce the mists, made glinting patches on the eddies of water. A squadron of ducks with green necks and red crests cruised beside the lovers along the brink, quacking softly with black eyes alert for bread crusts. But the two, with drawn brows bent on the gravel, did not heed them.

"I don't pretend, Georgy, that there's a way out without some-

body being hurt," Carless was saying. "Seems to me that soon as we grow up, we learn the good books are a mighty lot too simple with their 'plain right and wrong of it.' In most tight places I've found, it's a case of doing the most harm or the least. There's no way of doing no harm at all."

"Perhaps, Darrell. But to find the least harm ——"

"Well, let's look it in the face and go through it point by point, may we?"

"Go on!"

"Well: I'll start, then, by putting myself right on one side. I just don't matter."

"But you mustn't, Darrell, you can't! Why, to me you matter just everything."

"You don't quite mean that, Georgy, do you?" he answered sadly. "If you did, it would all be as easy as . . . well, running away. But I don't say that for reproach, you understand. You haven't only got me in your mind, and it's better, a thousand times, you shouldn't choose for my sake to make yourself unhappy. A week ago I wouldn't have said that, I can tell you. When I had you in my arms that morning ——" He shut his eyes, drawing a long breath. "I can still see you," he murmured, "with your hair all tumbled and the tan staining it and that starry look in your grey eyes. Oh! My God!" He clenched his hands with a sob. "Yes, I was ready then, I guess, for manslaughter or . . . or any villainy. But now," he opened his eyes again with a pitiful attempt at laughing away his suffering that opened a dark, deep wound in her heart, "now, I've got more sense. Remember when you came back to me after seeing your husband again? You were all hurts, then, weren't you, like a child, a child that I mustn't take up and comfort."

She regarded him with parted lips in an amazed tenderness.

"Since then," he went on, struggling for his words, "you've been different, quite different, for me. Not just the glorious girl I ached to carry off, but something . . . well . . . holy. Are you with me or away from me? It's queer, but it doesn't seem to matter all that much any longer. It's Heaven enough for me to have seen you, to have known you ——"

"Darrell, my love ——"

"And so — just let me get it out; — if you can be given happiness, that's all I'm here for. Happiness any way you see it beckoning to you . . . that's what I'd give my life to help you to; I want nothing for myself *now*; honest, I don't, Georgy!"

She could answer nothing, but with eyes brimming over she seized his hand and kissed it. He was checking this gesture of humility when a heavy step crunched on the path behind a bank of bushes just budding into purple flower, and the Guardian, eyeing them curiously as he passed, went by again on his patrol of the lake. They stood still till he had gone, looking in silence at the ripples and at the ducks, now definitely disappointed and quacking their way out, leaving little arrow-shaped wakes as they swam, to where the branches of the island dipped into the thick green water.

Darrell spoke with recovered calm. "Then take your husband. I can't sham that I care much about Riegelmann and what comes to him. At his very best, that tub of butter and brandy was no fit thing for you to quench your lovely youth in, Georgy. But there's no more best for him, Georgy. He's sinking, like a water-logged cargo tramp, and he can do nothing but drag you into the slime with him."

"But he's my husband."

"Don't you think, Georgy, you've worked out your contract by now?"

"I can't look at it quite that way. It was 'till death do us part.' I suppose my ideas about that are old-fashioned — they're mostly ideas Mother put there, and I've never questioned them before."

"But can't a living death part you — while there's time to save you? Why, cohabiting with Riegelmann is the grave, and the corruption thereof."

She shivered and they walked on for a while in silence until she turned to him again.

"Don't forget, Darrell, I blast what's left of Otto's life, of his character, if I leave him."

"Has all your patience, all your loyalty, pulled him a step uphill in your married life? Hasn't he, indeed, got worse now he has you to live on? Face the truth now, Georgy!"

"I know that's true, when I feel calm and hard. But when I

think of him rolling down to the bottom, without a hand held out, Darrell, without a friend to turn to, I'm made too weak by pity to think straight at all."

"Georgy, you can't save every one. You've got to harden your heart sometimes."

"I know, Darrell, I know." With an air of surrender she dropped into the lake a little blackened twig she had, while arguing, stripped from the bush. A small current whirled it out of sight. "That's that," she said. "Darrell, as between you and him, if that were all, I couldn't choose him."

Darrell straightened his back with an air of relief. "Thank God! Then it all boils down to the question of the kid. At least, we needn't any longer consider what's not worth considering. Now I've got to get out what's the hardest of all for me to say. I've been kept awake by this, when everything else seemed to me so simply and easily cut away, all of it false feeling, false respectability, weakness of the soul. But not this, no! Now, Georgy, we can try to make our get-away with Pansy; I'd give the world if I could tell you honestly I believed we were sure to bring it off. But it's not the game to deceive you. Riegelmann's going to hang on to the kid; every way, as he sees it, he's bound to. Through Pansy, he hopes to keep you; through Pansy, if you go, he'll seek to lure you back; by selling Pansy, for that's the plain English of it, in a short while from now to some acrobat troupe, he means to live — and I've a shrewd notion he's already got in mind the troupe he'll sell her to, as soon as her little limbs are strong enough for the first exercises."

"Who, Darrell?"

"The Rixens, of course. What's he always whispering and soaking with Joe about? More devilries than one, I'll allow. But I feel in my bones here's one of 'em. She's barely a year yet, is she? But Joe would take her when she was three. He likes to break in his colts young. Some question little Eth Vaughan asked me put me wise to what was in the wind."

Georgy stared in horror. "But I never knew Otto and Joe were together even —"

"No, you hold your head too high ever to see what's going on in the dirt under your nose."

"But, Darrell! Pansy with the Rixens! It's hellish! I'd kill Otto first. Still, anyhow, there'll be no need. We'll take her right away out of his clutches, at once, won't we?"

"We'll try, Georgy. But don't you forget, any court of law will give her back to him — in the circumstances."

"Then that settles it! I'll never leave her!"

"But does it settle it? I've thought it all out. Can you save her by staying? If he insists on apprenticing her to Rixen or some other acrobat or riding master — there's not much to choose between any of those I've seen — you can't dispute his right. He's the father; it's a regular thing to do. No magistrate, no law will interfere on your plea. Georgy, you can throw yourself away in the heroic attempt, but you can't save Otto's child from Otto. You can't save her from the drunkard's home, the drunkard's example, the drunkard's companions."

"At least, I can fight him for her soul!"

"And lose every time. The daughter goes to the father; that's nature. He'll spoil her; while you're strict, the stricter for your fears. He'll flatter her; while you're honest. He can wheedle you still. What trouble will he have in turning the head of a silly child, when it's his interest to bind her to him? If she's strong and straight, she'll save herself without you; if she's not, you'll be thrown away again for nothing."

"She'd die if I was taken away from her."

"She's not old enough, thank heaven, to remember afterwards that she ever had a mother. Doesn't it look like the finger of Providence, in a way?"

"But to desert my child ——"

A shy and tender appeal shone out of his dark eyes. "And what about your others, Georgy?"

"My others?"

"Yours and mine. You're slaying them before they're born. Those you could rear to happiness, those you could set your own heavenly stamp on without fear of its being trampled out, all those I've . . . I've been fool enough to dream and daydream about."

Her face twitched. "Oh, Darrell, don't, I can't bear it — only ——"



She looked aside, gazing at the lake. A quick burst of sunshine, warming the path on which she stood, played on the firm white curve of her neck and glittered like a shower of little gold leaves on the surface of the water. A puff of fresh wind set the branches waving, stirred a bright curl that had escaped beside the ear from the brim of her hat, and gently swayed two of the ducks that had paddled back to the bank with a fresh curiosity. Darrell watched her with strained attention, trying to divine the course of her inner struggle, and marked the sudden quiver of her mouth.

He broke in upon her thoughts. "The worst of it for me," he said in a suffering voice, "is this: that I can't use the argument that counts most with me. You'll only listen if I speak of what's due to the rest of us. Pansy, Otto, even me — you reckon up our claims, torture yourself with them. But I'm thinking of you. . . . No, don't interrupt! You ought to listen for just this once. Why should you be the one that has to pay for all? You're worth as much as Pansy, I reckon, worth miles more than Otto. You're young, younger than your age, for you've been wife and mother without being wakened into woman; you're lovely; you've the pluck and the brains to do anything. I'm not clever enough to know how high you may go in the circus business, if the heart isn't beaten out of you; but I suppose there's no other work you could turn your hand to, if you ever get sick of the ring, that you couldn't shine at. Haven't you the right to grow, to enjoy, to live out your life with all the strength of your body, all the skill of your brain, all that sweet, generous soul of you, that's like sunshine for all who come near. . . . Say, you talked to me about God just now; I don't claim to know much about His thoughts, but what is there that could make the skies weep worse than the waste of you? That may be bad Bible religion; but it's what is burning me all up inside and it had to come out once at any rate."

"If I could get away with Pansy —"

"You'd come? It's worth trying. An old copper makes a good crook. Give me a night to work out a scheme, and we might get away with the kid, in spite of 'em all. How do you stand with Michel?"

"That's all clear. My contract finishes at the end of next week. Michel wanted me to renew with Patrico, who's been quite a hit, though never himself since that morning Joe scared him. But Michel's been too mean. He writes I'm to see him on Monday: *Pour entendre mon dernier mot*. But I needn't—I don't think I meant to in any case—and, as I shall have done all I promised Dussault by midnight to-morrow, I shall be free by Saturday next. What about you?"

"Oh, out too, of course. Michel only kept me to humour you and Dussault. I finish the same date as you. It's lucky, since they'll have no ground to chase after either of us for breach."

"That's taking it as fixed that we're going, Darrell."

His forehead clouded. "Aren't you sure then *yet*, Georgy?"

"Tell me your plan on Monday and I'll tell you yes or no. I must have just this last chance to think it all over. I'm not asking for long, Darrell."

"All right, Georgy. It's for you to say: I've no right to press you. But, suppose it's all right, where is the kid now?"

"At the Pension. They discharged her from hospital yesterday. The plan at present is that Ivy takes her on Monday to Boulogne, to a sort of cottage sanatorium, to give her sea air."

"We may give her the sea air, Georgy! Well, that wants some thinking out." He looked at his watch. "Perhaps we'd better be getting back. I expect you've things to do before the show this afternoon."

"Dozens! Call at Dussault's to refit a costume to begin with."

"And there's no point in waking up Riegelmann's suspicions by long absences between now and then. All right. Oh! Georgy!" He seized her hand as if he would pull her to him and spirit her away on the moment.

"Darrell, darling!" He could not misread the love in her voice or the disquiet still lingering in her eyes.

The murmur of well-bred conversation and laughter ran round the little circle of Dussault's private amphitheatre. Every appointment shone and glittered with polish—the silver torches that

held the electrics, the silver rods of the stair carpets, the dark wood of the fauteuils. The ring, which seemed larger than normal because of the narrow margin of spectators, was covered with a fresh matting of cocoanut fibre instead of tan; the blue velvet along the fence had been renewed; the brocaded silver and blue curtains over the entry gleamed from the hands of the cleaners. Towards the milky cluster of electric bowls that lit the shallow dome, with its painting of a horsewoman in the long black habit of the 'eighties, prancing to meet a centaur with pipes, there went up the continuous hum of the fashionable audience. The shimmering evening frocks and shining heads of the ladies spread a foam of light colour over the plush of the armchairs, while a reporter, if one had ever been admitted to Dussault's jealously guarded performances, could have marked down in his notebook a celebrity for every black coat he saw. There lolled a world-famous minister with fat, smiling jaws and fuzzy black moustache; there the editor of a great paper, debarred from furnishing as much as a paragraph to his own organ, his knifelike eyes gleaming behind pince-nez as he twisted his slim white imperial; there (already contemptuous) the Futurist rival of the Modernist poet Regnault, with sallow cheeks and slanting Chinese eyebrows. Jovial merriment came from a small party that included a cavalry general in uniform, two marquises of old lineage, with the hale complexion of country gentlemen, and a white-haired duchess with masculine features, who was mistress of her own pack of staghounds.

But to the professional members of Dussault's company, who ventured from time to time to peep through the fringed curtains from behind, no group in the audience was of such interest as that which occupied the half dozen front-row stalls immediately facing the entry. Here sat the great circus proprietors, Parisian or visitors, who regularly accepted Dussault's invitations both as a compliment and as an opportunity for snapping up his discoveries. Michel, with his tangle of beard, writhed amiably in elegant evening clothes; the stout Dutoit of the Grand Cirque sat stolid, listening to him, a cigar between his lips; Captain Joliffe, the London impresario, chubby and genial, was standing up to shake hands with Dussault, who had crossed the ring to

greet him; Krauss of Berlin was grim and aloof with his Kaiser moustaches and receding Prussian forehead; Giustiniani, the young Italian who had taken over Imperiali's interests, glittered with a continual fallacious smile. But it was upon none of these, thrilling though their presence would have been at any other time, that the attention of the professional observers was concentrated. Frank Birlingham, in evening dress with a shining top hat that diminished towards the crown, drew Georgy to his side, as she was crossing from the dressing rooms to the stables, and holding the curtains an inch apart, pointed through them at an old man with a feathery bush of white hair, gold spectacles on a gaunt nose, and a paunch covered by acres of straining white waistcoat afire with diamond buttons. "Look, Georgy dear," he murmured. "Jorum! Lord, don't you feel back in the nursery again?"

"Is it really Jorum?" asked Georgy, gazing with reverence at the old man whose cracked American intonation floated across the ring towards them in a lull of the general talk.

"Leonidas Jeremy Jorum," repeated the clown. "Himself, not his mummy. It don't seem credible, do it? Gosh! He's a bigger marvel than any of those he's played off onto the uncomplaining public all these years. Why," he calculated, "my grandmother had ringlets down her back when she saw him at the Egyptian Hall with Admiral Popcorn the midget; that makes him a ripe seventy, at least. Yet he looks fresh as a two-year-old and lively too."

Both he and his companion were silent, recalling a legend of their childhood, as the small band of choice players in the gallery overhead began the Overture with a mellow flourish. Jorum had been for fifty years the most famous showman on earth. He had made his first hundred dollars by offering the hicks at a Middle West fair cups of tea from the original cargo thrown overboard in Boston Harbour by the rebellious Colonists, now dredged up (he proclaimed) at immense expense by his own divers. Since then he had gone from triumph to triumph. He had deluded two hemispheres with the Kentucky Giant from the stalactite caves, an immense mouldering relic that gaped at length at the seams, disclosing plaster of Paris. But by that time he was ex-

plotting the high trills of a Rumanian peasant woman whom he had overheard scolding her children on the emigrants' deck of the liner in which he was recrossing from Europe. When Madame Viridescu at last tore herself from his expensive embraces to sing for her own profit, he returned to the Old World, to appear at the courts of Queen Victoria, the Tsar and the Sultan, leading by each hand a dwarf whose dietary, hobbies and intellectual interests filled the bill pages of the European Press. The interference of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals made a fiasco of his attempt to stage a wrestling match between a live Lion and the only Unicorn ever discovered in Nature; but he became again the biggest man in England or America when Notes were exchanged between the two Governments on the occasion of his seeking to buy the Brighton Pavilion and reërect it as his private bungalow in Rhode Island. He had been three times a millionaire, twice a bankrupt; had built a city of fifty thousand inhabitants in his native State and seen it burnt to the ground. Latterly, however, he had given all his energies to the gigantic tenting circus with which year after year he toured the New World and made occasional triumphant raids upon the Old. To top Jorum's bill was, both for fame and money, the height of every circus star's ambition.

"I'm on," said Birlingham casually, as the Overture drew to its conclusion; and, parting the curtains, he stepped out into the ring to prepare the way in deliberately absurd French for the amateur acts that were to begin the programme. The audience were shown in turn a young lady, daughter of a Jewish financier, whom Dussault had coached in bareback riding; two clowns whose frenzied make-up disguised a young playwright and a junior official from the Foreign Office; a double jockey act in which the heir to a title was partnered, and visibly assisted, by a professional woman rider from the Grand Cirque; a trapeze act by a celebrated writer of melancholy and passionate travel books; and a display of hand-balancing by four athletic members of the best clubs. The audience as a whole were appreciative of the surprising feats of their acquaintances, but the expressions of the circus proprietors in the front row would have entertained a humorist.

They relaxed, however, when Dussault himself presented his quartette of creams at liberty, for there was no trainer who could manœuvre horses more skilfully. To see the four stately creatures, with their falling manes and large watchful eyes, respond with pliant grace to his deep-voiced "*All-e-e-ez!*", was like watching the majestic drill of a Royal Regiment in the days of pikes and periwigs. It was as finished as anything in the professional part of the programme that followed, comprising a brilliant trio of musical clowns from Italy, a male Argentine bareback rider with eyes that captivated all the women in the house at the first glance, a Charlie Chaplin on a slack wire, and the first Risley Troupe in Europe, clad in gorgeous silks and velvets.

As these disappeared behind the curtains with a flash of epaulettes and crimson cloaks, Georgina Dufay trotted into the ring on Ruy Blas, instantly arousing the enthusiasm of the horsemen present for the magnificent, satin-skinned beast she bestrode, and the envious admiration of the women for the perfection of her own turn-out, from the shining crown of her silk hat to the gleam of her toes in the silver stirrups. The first murmurs of "*Charmante!*" "*Très chic!*" died away in the gathering attention claimed by the harmonious ease of her seat and her delicate control of the horse. The classical paces, the fruit of Dussault's hard training, were finished enough to satisfy the expert school-riders among the managers; and these were followed by a series of dance steps to tunes of the moment — a happy change from the Spanish solemnity of the first part — to which Georgy's own laughing pleasure in the lilting syncopation added a catching enjoyment that made the house take the English stranger to its heart. And for her conclusion Georgy had wrung from Dussault, who hated what he called "*les trucs de Rodeo, Madame,*" reluctant leave to introduce a thrilling surprise. After ending his tango, Ruy Blas, at a tap from her whip on his withers, rose up in an almost vertical line on his hind legs and backed out thus slowly through the upraised curtains, bearing his rider aloft, with her golden head uncovered, like some Grecian goddess withdrawing into her clouds. "*Bonne tenue!*" said Dutoit emphatically, removing his cigar from his lips for the first time that evening, and his words gave the signal for long and hearty ap-



plause. Behind the curtains Georgy, as she dismounted, was astonished by the apparition of Dussault shaking a finger at her like a schoolmaster and saying in emphatic syllables, "*Vous avez très bien monté ce soir, Madame mon élève, très bien!*" "Thank Heaven!" she thought, as she reached the staircase to change for the pantomime that was to follow. "I was afraid I should let them all down to-night through my worries!"

She had now only to make her *entrée* in the satiric equestrian spectacle *Veuve Satan*. This began with the appearance of the clown Follette, an old favourite of Parisian audiences, as a matrimonial agent sitting at an office table. To him entered in an elegant *coupé* Madame Satan, the Devil's widow, in rich purple mourning; and the audience hummed, as they recognized that Dussault, whose audacity knew no bounds, had secured for this role a *sociétaire* of the Comédie Française. She gave the agent her card, which exploded in red sparks, and explained that, her husband having left her his business to carry on, she was resolved to marry again. "I thought I should replace dear Satan most easily in Paris." "Nothing simpler!" assents the agent. "To help you in your choice, *allons voir le défilé de tout Paris au Bois.*"

In a second scene the two are seated at an outdoor café in the Bois, served by an acrobatic contortionist as waiter. The poet is the first possible choice. He appears with green hair, walking delicately along the ring fence. Asked to give a taste of his capacity, he unrolls a manuscript that stretches right across the arena. "*Assez! Assez!*" cries the Devil's widow. "*Je veux me marier avant la fin du siècle.*" The waiter seeks to console the poet by hooking the moon off the roof of the café with the shutter pole. Alas! It comes down already covered with advertisements!

Next enters on horseback, followed by his groom, M. le Duc, *le clubman parfait*. He performs with stiff dignity a bareback act in a frockcoat, travestied at every turn by the red-headed groom. But he too is rejected. "*Trop de morgue!* My poor dear Lucifer was not so proud!" The agent points to M. le Ministre, overhead, running along the parliamentary wire. "His balance is wonderful," agrees the widow, after fastening her lorgnette on him. "But I would prefer a man of my own. *Ça, c'est déjà trois fois vendu!*" There was a little gasp in the house at this im-

pertinence, and one or two heads were turned cautiously to the real Cabinet Minister in his fauteuil. He showed nothing but a weary smile on his drooping cheeks.

Meanwhile the Jewish banker has driven into the ring in a landau drawn by two superb blacks. He offers bags of gold coin. "All borrowed from me," says the Devil's widow aside to the agent, "and I must own I'm afraid of him. He swindled poor Satan shamefully and I'm sure he'd get the better of me." The Jew departs in a fury, standing on the backs of his carriage horses and brandishing his whip.

"I will show you, then, something very different," suggests the agent, "*la gloire de la France*," and the young officer, played by a slim girl pupil of Dussault's, rides past on a beautiful chestnut. "*Ah! qu'il est beau!*" exclaims Madame, "but what have I to do with devotion?"

The agent tears his hair. "*Allons, Madame, vous êtes bien difficile!* Pick for yourself in the name of — your late husband. Look!" He points to the audience. "Are there not enough here to choose from?"

Madame Satan makes a slow parade of the ring and stops at length before a stall in which lolls Birlingham, in evening dress and eyeglass.

"Your name, young man?"

"M. Je-m'en-Fiche."

"Who is he?" she asks the agent.

"A very fashionable young man, Madame. He knows nothing; he believes nothing; he does nothing and can feel nothing. *Croyez-moi, il fait école.*"

"Young Man of To-morrow, will you marry me?"

"Something new, what?" says the loungeer, climbing into the ring, and the agent blesses them as the scene gives place to the Grand Ballet of Coins; "For my dowry," explains Madame Satan, "is all the money upon earth." In this ballet Georgy had the part of the English sovereign, appearing sidesaddle on a white charger in an Elizabethan robe of cloth-of-gold with a lace ruff and a live hawk on her gauntleted wrist. She had a brief scene in gesture to play before taking her place in a resplendent mounted minuet, with the finish of which, in a whirling of coloured lights

and a shower of golden rain from the dome, Dussault's most successful performance ended triumphantly.

5

The next hour was like a fashionable reception. The audience overflowed the arena of the private circus, the stables and the great riding school, where a splendid buffet had been set up and the *manège* covered with little supper tables. Dussault liked the performers to mix with his guests in their costumes; and Georgy, though anxious to return to her baby, felt that she could not disoblige him on this night. Despite the ache of her personal distresses, she could not help feeling, also, a thrill of excitement; she had not been too distracted to realize that she was making a hit and very soon she had more evidence of it. For, as she came down from her dressing room, where she had gone for a minute to powder, Michel met her at the foot of the stairs. "A great success, Madame, for the Cirque d'Or!" he told her proudly. "I shall see you early Monday morning, *n'est-ce pas?*, to discuss the future. I believe my fellow directors will allow me, Madame, to make proposals that will attract you for the summer season." He passed away, smiling with unreal geniality, and on entering the riding school, she was at once offered a glass of champagne by Dutoit of the Grand Cirque. "You must let me introduce myself, Madame," he said bluntly. "When I tell you that I, — *blasé, mon Dieu* if ever man was! — felt like a child at its first circus when I was watching you . . . well, Madame, I assure you that means something from Alphonse Dutoit. . . . My colleague Michel and the Cirque d'Or are fortunate in the long contract they tell me they have made with you. There is not, I suppose, the smallest hope," his little eyes glistened with cunning, "of your engagement terminating sooner? Some clause of release in your contract, perhaps, in case of emergency? If matters could be arranged — a doctor's certificate is often very useful — the Grand Cirque, Madame, would be proud to offer you terms that, *ma foi*, I believe would surprise you. I back my fancies, when I have them, royally, Madame Dufay."

Georgy murmured something amiable and passed on to find

her way barred by the sergeant-major's bulk of Krauss. "Pardon, *gnädige Frau*," he said gruffly. "You have learned no doubt to speak German from your husband? I can offer you an engagement of twelve weeks from May to July at the Zirkus Krauss, Berlin. Will you kindly state your terms?" He pulled out a businesslike little notebook with his firm's name printed at the top of each detachable leaf and carbon sheets between. "Well?" He had produced an indelible pencil and stood ready to enter her name. She could not help laughing at his brusqueness. "But Herr Krauss," she expostulated, "I must really have time to consider my arrangements. May I write to you and let you know?" He thrust the notebook angrily back into his pocket. "Opportunity lost is not recalled!" he declared with a frown. "Still," he relented a little. "Write, if you wish: write to-morrow to me at Hotel Majestic."

She strayed on through the chattering crowd, still searching for Dussault to thank him; and as she went she saw Captain Joliffe and Giustiniani in close conference; their eyes followed her as she passed. She could guess what the cautious Englishman was discussing with the Italian, who acted as his Equestrian Director every Christmas at the Stadion in London.

Suddenly a hand touched her elbow, and, turning, she came face to face with Dussault, who, elegant and calm as usual, was piloting through the press the immense figure of Jorum, rubicund and hearty, his eyes under their shaggy brows glinting like pinpoints behind his gold spectacles.

"M. Jorum requests the honour of an introduction ——" began Dussault.

"—— which I'm not quite sure that I need, young lady," interrupted Jorum in his wheezy squeak. "Didn't I meet you at the depot in Buffalo four years ago this fall?"

"I'm afraid I never was in America, Mr. Jorum," answered Georgy.

"No? No-o-o? Wa-al, you do mos' nearly take my breath away. Say, though, I don't think I'm ever wrong about a face. No. Of course! I've got you now. It was in the lounge of the Franz-Josef Hotel, Vienna, last spring, wasn't it?"

"I'm quite sure I never had the honour of meeting you, Mr. Jorum. I shouldn't forget it."

"Wa-al, if that isn't a pity! I thought, M. Dussault, I'd happened on an acquaintance. You must forgive an old fellow his mistake, young lady, and not let me keep you standing here." He made a feint to take Dussault's arm and pass on. Then pausing, with his eyes shifting and flitting about under the glasses, he observed, "You're no relative of George Dufay, the circus owner, naturally."

"*C'est sa fille*," remarked Dussault drily.

"No! Never old George's daughter? Well: search me! Shake, my dear, shake!" Delighted perspiration seemed to break out over the huge red face. "Mr. Dussault, I allow I'm bound to pledge this lady in a glass of your fine champagne for old land's sake. George Dufay was one of the whitest men from this side the herring pond. I could tell you one of the best stories, sir, of how he dealt with an impertinent nigger on the Scorching Susannah Limited, pulling out from Memphis. He was one of my oldest and best valued friends." A waiter had hurried up with a bottle of champagne. "Now, my dear, you'll let me drink both your healths together." He touched the glass with his lips and put it down. Georgy was bewildered, for she doubted if her father had as much as spoken to Jorum; he had certainly never mentioned him at any time as a friend. "And did you, my dear," went on Jorum, beaming at her like a benevolent uncle, "ever think of taking up your old Dad's line — *professionally*?"

Dussault's patience gave way. "You saw Madame's performance this evening, M. Jorum. Did she look like an amateur?"

"Why?" Jorum's face was a moon of innocent bewilderment. "I surely supposed she was one of your young lady pupils, M. Dussault." Georgy reddened. "Am I wrawng? Is it pawssible you've had experience, *professional* experience, Miss Dufay?"

"Madame served a hard apprenticeship in England, and she has been high on the programme here at the Cirque d'Or for weeks," answered Dussault.

"You surprise me, sir, you surprise me! Young lady, I'll have to apologize to you for my ignorance. But it passes even L. J.

Jorum to keep track of all the new little stars that rise — and fall. You like the circus, Miss Dufay?"

"It happens to be my business, Mr. Jorum."

"Wa-al, it's a risky one, isn't it? I watched your act to-night. You had a lovely horse; one of *your* training, eh, M. Dussault? Folks can't go far wrong on any of M. Dussault's horses. But, Miss Dufay, if you really think it worth your while to go on with this, I'd like to hold out a hand to you for your father's sake. If I could find you a little niche in Jorum's, that would be a fine thing for you, I guess? But I just can't, you see. I'm full; every small job has a waiting list from here to N'York nearly. Still, George Dufay's niece, ain't you?"

"His daughter, Mr. Jorum," replied Georgy shortly. "And I've no need of a job, thank you very much. I have two or three offers to consider."

"Wa-al, that's plumb lucky." Jorum seemed relieved. "For I couldn't really have fitted you in. But I'd like to see more of you. You want to hear about that nigger. It'll make you cry with laughing. And you'll tell me the noos about dear old James, your father." He fumbled for a pocket buried in his great white waistcoat. "Could we fix luncheon one day?"

"I'm afraid I'm very much engaged this week," Georgy was beginning, when suddenly she perceived Dussault behind the bulge of Jorum's shoulder frowning at her and shaking his head. Jorum paused enquiringly and the Frenchman stepped forward. "I believe Madame has Tuesday free. If you, M. Jorum, and she would do me the honour of lunching here —?"

"Why, I guess there's no end to your hospitalities, sir! But I'll be right glad of your better acquaintance, M. Dussault. Expect me at the hour you like to name. Now, it's long past my nightcap time, so I'll beat it. Good-night, M. Dussault. Good-night, Miss Dufay. . . . Shall I see you as well on Toosday? I'm delighted. Remind me to tell you all about that nigger."

Dussault looked at Georgy's resentful face and his smile broadened. "Spitfire!" he said at length. "Why do you wish to spoil your own fortune?"

"My fortune? With *that* man? Why, M. Dussault, he is outrageous! He only wanted to insult me, I think."



"Lucky are they whom *le grand Jorum* takes the trouble to insult."

"I don't think so. Anyway, I needn't worry about him! Do you know, Monsieur, I have had offers this evening from Michel, Dutoit, Krauss, and I owe every one of them to you. However can I repay you?"

"By attending to me now and using the brains the good God has given you. Dutoit, Krauss, — of course my pupil will be welcome in their rings at any time; they will think themselves lucky. But I have prepared you for Jorum."

"I'd rather go with a real circus man like Krauss, Monsieur. Jorum's is only a glorified freak show, when all's said."

"Ah! *L'art pour l'art!* Yes, that is all right for me. But you have your career to make. I repeat, I have prepared you for Jorum. It is not easy to hook that very big fish, but I have done it."

"Well, it didn't look like it, Monsieur, I must say. I've never seen a man less impressed."

"Child! I thought all you English and Americans understood business. Of course, he will try to cheapen you, the old rogue. But you put yourself in my hands on Tuesday and I will arrange everything. You will go to America with Jorum."

Go to America with Jorum! The words checked her rising excitement and a cold fear shot through her. More and more, as the evening with its succession of triumphs went on, she had been caught up by her old ambitions, had seen again the glittering vision of success at the end of the lane of struggle, but the lane shorter now and the blaze of victory much brighter. For a moment Jorum's calculated depreciation had chilled her, but Dussault's disclosure of its purpose had uplifted her again intoxicatingly. And now the dream had fallen to bits. "You will go to America with Jorum." Was it going to turn out so? Was it not more likely that she would in a few days be a fugitive with Darrell? What future he had planned for them, and where, she had no idea; she was no longer her own mistress. The prospect of life with him was as heavenly as ever; but none the less there was a bitterness in this moment of renunciation. All the labour of her body and soul since the night when her independence had

been born in the dark corner of the Coburg Palace, was now to be wasted; with her own hand she was going to throw away the fruits of her achievement at the moment of their ripeness; she was shooting her first beams as a star and would violently quench them.

And so for the moment she hesitated and stammered.

"But, Monsieur, it is at least evident that Jorum is attracted by Ruy Blas, not by me. I have no horse fit for me to ride in Jorum's Show."

"As for Ruy Blas, Jorum will buy him from me, and we will make some arrangement for you to acquire him, if you like, by instalments from your salary. That is where I shall do my little stroke of business. Alas! We must all be merchants in this age. And you are wrong, too, when you say you have no horse fit for Jorum's. *Mon Dieu*, have you not Aldebaran?"

"Patricol! You promised, Monsieur, to tell me —"

"I shall keep my promise. We will surprise Jorum, and Aldebaran shall astound America."

"If I can go to America, Monsieur! I have many things and people to take into account."

Dussault paternally slipped his arm into hers and walked aside with her behind one of the pillars of the riding school.

"*Fais pas de bêtises!*" he said with a sort of bluff tenderness. "Don't wreck your career for a caprice, and such an untalented one! An artist! She has no right to a private life. You belong now to your horses and your public; the woman, my friend, must suffer. It is the ransom of greatness, and I will make you great. Go home, now, and ponder what I have said. Return on Tuesday — and return wise."

6

Georgy made haste to get away after this conversation and was soon driving in a belated taxi through the silent Champs Elysées towards her hotel. While she was dressing, a vision of Darrell's pleading eyes and quivering lips had come before her so vividly that he seemed almost in the room with her, and with it the large face and shifting glances of Jorum, the persuasive counsel of

Dussault, had faded right out of her mind; she felt ashamed of her hesitations. She was going with Darrell, whatever the upshot; she was going when and whither he told her. But what plan had he made for their escape? How were they going to steal Pansy from Otto's vigilance? It was not likely to be easy, either, to elope with three horses, and yet they could not afford to go without them. Anyhow, Darrell was arranging; she would put herself in the hands of Darrell. She sank back on the cushion with a sense of delicious peacefulness.

The jerk of the cab roused her as it checked before the Pension Maugras. She let herself into the black hall with the key she had been given and lit a match to guide her to the foot of the stairs. Suddenly she stopped with a jump of the heart and let the flame run down till it burnt her fingers. Upstairs somebody was sobbing. "Somebody staying here ill or in trouble," she murmured, as she felt for another match. But even as she struck it she was aware of something familiar in the sound, and a long moan as the second light flared out made her cry, "It's Ivy!" and, terrified, she ran up the dark stairs and through the sitting room.

In the bedroom behind, where a light was on, Ivy sat rocking herself in a chair and sobbing. But what struck Georgy's eye before that, and held her planted on the threshold, was Pansy's cot, empty, with the bedclothes tossed in disorder.

"What is it, Ivy?" she gasped. "Where's Pansy? What have you done with her?"

"They took her away," wailed Ivy, in a stifled voice through her wet handkerchief. "It wasn't my fault, mum; I couldn't stop them."

"Stop who?" cried Georgy. "Who took her?"

"Mr. Riegelmann, mum, and the thin, tall gentleman that always frightens me so!"

Georgy felt a cold wave pass right through her and beat her down into a pit of blackness and despair. She was defeated, and for a second there gleamed palely before her the whole landscape of her desolate future. Then a scalding terror at the idea of her child helpless in the hands of Otto and Rixen effaced all other thoughts.

"When did they do this?" she asked huskily.

"Oh! Hours ago, I think, mum; I've been wretched and crying for so long; I thought you was never coming home."

"But why didn't you come and tell me at once, you helpless little fool? You knew where I was!"

"Oh, mum, I dursn't go among all them gentry. What would they have thought? They'd never 'ave let me in!"

Georgy stamped with fury and turned impatiently from her. The girl broke out into fresh, loud sobs.

"Oh, stop that row, at least! Do you think that will help us? Can't you tell me anything more? How did they take her? Couldn't you get any hint where to? What were you doing all the time?"

"They wrapped her in your pink woolly negligy, mum. I said not to, 'cos it was your best; they found it in the wardrobe. I said you'd want it ——"

"Oh, damn the jacket! Where did they go?"

"Downstairs!"

"Did they go off in a taxi? Didn't you follow them?"

"I dursn't," squeaked Ivy. "I came out on the landing and the tall gent turns round and looks at me that horrible ——"

"So you know nothing at all?"

"Mr. Riegelmann says, 'I wisht you were crossing with me, Joe.' He said that going downstairs. I know he said it 'cos I heard him."

"Crossing! Then he's taken her back to England, and Joe not with him. Oh! Thank God! Ivy, girl, I'm sorry I was cross with you. It wasn't your fault. But I was so frightened."

"Oh, mum! I forgot! Mr. Riegelmann he showed me a letter for you and he put it on the mantelpiece in the sitting room."

"You utter little idiot!" Georgy rushed through the folding doors, switched on the light and snatched the envelope where it leant against the grey marble clock. It was in Otto's most careful hand, always beautifully neat when he was sober.

MY DEAR GEORGINA,

The time has come, I am sorry to have to say, when I must take steps to protect my daughter against the consequences of your conduct. As you now seem quite blind to your duties as my wife

and ready to forget yourself completely with that ruffianly bruiser, Carless —

She broke off her reading. "Joe!" she thought. "This was dictated by him." She read on:

— I have removed Pansy for the present from the danger she is in from such a mother. I do not wish her to grow up among shameful scenes. I am taking her straight to England where she will be placed in safe keeping. When I have arranged everything, I will send you an address in London where, if you still have a mother's heart and really want to see her again, you can meet me and we will talk over the situation your misconduct has brought upon us. If you want to meet your child ever again, you had better make up your mind to leave Paris and break for good and all with the man who is leading you astray. You would be nothing but a fool to go with a man who, I can tell you, stands already on the verge of ruin. You had better come at once when you have my next letter, as my patience will not hold out for ever.

Your husband,

OTTO RIEGELMANN.

Georgy with numb fingers folded the letter and thrust it into the pocket of her overcoat; then she stood dully watching the sky thin into morning grey behind the sharp silhouettes of roofs and chimney pots across the road. At a rustling sound behind her she turned and saw Ivy peering through the folding doors.

"Go to bed now, Ivy," she said calmly. "You needn't worry any longer. Mr. Riegelmann tells me in this letter that he's taken Pansy back to London with him."

A pale smile came over the little drudge's tear-furrowed face. "Then it's all right, mum? And you'll be going to London after her?"

Georgy turned and looked at her for a moment with an expression of which even Ivy's feeble wits could read the anguish. "Yes, Ivy," she said in a small, flat voice. "It's all right. I'm going to London after her. . . ."

Ivy woke at about eight and crept downstairs from her attic. In the front sitting room the light was still burning; her mistress was walking to and fro still in her coat and hat.

"Oh, mum!" she gasped, "ain't you never been to bed at all?"

Georgy looked at her with a vague air; then, passing her hand over her eyes, asked hoarsely, "What's the time?"

"Just struck eight by the church at the back, mum!"

Georgy gave a sigh of relief. "I can go then. Get me a towel; I must tidy up a bit."

"But, what about your breakfast, mum?"

"That can wait. Go and find a taxi, there's a dear, while I wash."

She knew that the Cirque d'Or would be open by now and that Darrell always arrived early to groom his horse, Trooper. She would catch him at once and get it over. Then there would be nothing left to do but to wait until Otto sent the address and go back to reclaim her daughter. "And, once I've got you in my arms again," she murmured, as the warm, fragile feeling of the child's body stole over her memory while she stood with closed eyes and aching head, "I'll take no more risks of losing you, my darling, I swear it."

The walls of the Cirque d'Or, when she reached it, seemed to be plastered with new bills announcing the Rixen Troupe. *THE SPRITE BY NIGHT IN BLACK AND WHITE*, ran the title in English, accompanied by a tall drawing of Joe against a background of Gothic graves. As Georgy stepped out of her cab, she saw the old night watchman in gesticulating parley with a circle of grooms and workmen. "Is M. Carless here yet, Armand?" she asked, going hurriedly towards him.

The old man turned and started. "M. Carless?" he demanded in a stupefied tone. "You have not heard, then, Madame? M. Carless has suffered a great misfortune."

"Not hurt? Not dead?" cried Georgy, turning ashen.

"Oh, no, Madame!" said the old man with kindly haste. "It is not he, but his horse."

"Trooper?"

"Dead, Madame!"

"Dead? But how?"

Armand grimaced. "Better keep one's mouth closed, no doubt. Still, for me, I care not who hears; it is a case of poisoning. I have seen plenty of others."

Georgy, faint with agony, sleeplessness and fasting, felt the



dirty passage, the old man's grey moustaches, the sardonic faces of the listening grooms, tilt up and spin round her in a dance she could not control. She reached out a hand against the wall to steady herself and by a frantic effort recovered control of her senses. It was on the top of this catastrophe then that she must bring Darrell the news of her own decision; must strike the last hope out of a life already laid waste by the death of his only friend and the professional ruin it entailed. She could not do it, not yet; she must find a way to temporize. "Where is M. Carless?" she asked at length.

"Up in the stables. *Pauvre bougre!* He will not leave the carcass. They try to persuade him; he can do no good; but he will not budge."

Georgy stumbled up the incline to the stables. At the top of it she saw the assistant ringmaster in consultation with two ostlers.

"You seek M. Carless, Madame?" The official eyed her with hostility. "Persuade him, then, if you can, to come away. He must see the Director and we must move the carcass. We cannot have a scandal at the Cirque d'Or."

Georgy pushed by him and hurried round the curve towards Trooper's loosebox. The stables seemed very quiet this morning; the grooms worked in glum silence or whispered in little clusters. At length she came to the secluded loosebox behind another stall where Trooper had been put.

She had braced herself before entering, to confront a sight that she knew would be appalling to a horsewoman like herself; but she could not withhold a sobbing breath when she saw it.

The morning sunshine found its way into the loosebox through a high window of greenish glass. It fell in a broad shaft that left the corners of the place in dimness; and against this gloom the mountainous white flanks lying on the straw beneath the window gleamed in stark outline. Their stillness seemed to challenge the beholder and forbid him, too, to move. A flickering beam or two played upon the great polished hoofs that now pressed like useless weights upon the yellow stalks, drawn up a little in the agonized contraction of the hind legs. The silky white mane was scattered in pitiful confusion over the neck and forehead, and

through its wisps one glassy, half-closed eye gazed spectrally. The teeth, fiercely clenched, still glimmered between the retracted lips and the convulsive foam had dried on them in frozen bubbles. Before Georgy's eyes came the vision of the gentle, wise head that she had come to love with her increasing love of Trooper's master, and her heart welled over with pity.

Then she heard a movement in the straw and for the first time saw Darrell. He was crouched down behind the body of his horse in the darkness below the window, his lean, brown hand with its square finger tips mechanically stroking the dead flank and his eyes fixed on the irresponsive head in desperate appeal. In a moment Georgy was stooping beside him and her tears were falling on his dark head. "Oh! Darrell! Darrell!" she said.

For a moment her eyes were blinded by their veil of tears; then, as she cleared them with the back of her hand, she saw him recognize her and a pathetic gleam of relief dawn through the torture on his face.

"It's you, Georgy?" he said in a shaking voice. "Thank God! That's real good of you. Guess I was about going crazy." With an effort he staggered to his feet, his breeches and shirt covered with flecks of straw, and gazed at her. "You look real bad too," he murmured. "When did you hear of this?"

She turned her head aside, sobbing.

"Don't, Georgy, don't," he pleaded; "you mustn't take on so. You'll break me all up if you do."

She seized his wrists. "Come away from here, Darrell!" she begged. "You've done all you could —"

"Done!" his voice went almost to a shout. "I couldn't do *anything*. It was over, Georgy, before I got here. Do you understand? He was suffering, in hell, for hours perhaps, while I was snoring in my quarters. Nobody cared, nobody told me, blast and damn them! He was stiff like that when I arrived. Hasn't spoken to me, hasn't moved! Trooper! Not speak to me!"

She sought desperately to quiet him. "No use to make yourself ill on the top of it, Darrell! You can do nothing for the poor old man now. You must let them take him away to examine him."

"What do they want with examining him? He sha'n't be mauled about. I can tell them all they need to know. He was poisoned with arsenic. I've seen it done to a racing crack in Canada. I saw *him* stiff too, and I know the symptoms. Do they want to know how it was given him. It was sprayed into the drinking trough yonder: I tasted it on my tongue. No, don't you go near it, Georgy." He pulled her back. "When was it done? During last night. Who did it? Well, I guess I don't have to tell *you* that."

Suddenly a phrase in Otto's letter, still lying, a serpent coiled, in her pocket, flashed before her. "You would be nothing but a fool to go with a man who, I can tell you, stands already on the verge of ruin." She thrilled with a new horror. "You don't think my *husband* — "

"Otto Riegelmann? He don't wear a shoe this size. This was done by the man I wouldn't hit below the belt two weeks ago."

"Can you prove it, Darrell? Can you prove it? If so, we'll nail Rixen!"

He turned away from her almost roughly and collapsed with a jerk of laughter on his Cossack saddle in a corner of the box. "Gee, you're innocent! Prove it? How can I prove it? Think Rixen leaves a trail of arsenic wherever he walks for a sleuth to follow?"

"Did the night groom see nothing?" faltered Georgy.

"Bolted! He was well palm-oiled, you bet. We'll not set eyes on him, unless one day we find him travelling with the only Rixen Troupe, World's Eccentrics." He broke into wild laughter.

Georgy seized him by the shoulder and tried to shake him. "Stop, Darrell! Be a man. What good's this going to do you?"

He sat for a moment with his face in his hands, his shoulders heaving. Then he controlled himself and got on his feet again, the perspiration glistening all over his face. "I'm real sorry, Georgy," he panted. "I ought to have taken hold of myself. I don't know what's come to me in this damned circus atmosphere. I could take punishment before." For a moment he leaned his forehead against the wall. Then he turned back to her and spoke calmly.

"You see, Georgy, I've no way of trailing this man. He's a professor of crooks; I've been working round and round here like a madman; he's not left a shadow of a print. His confederate's off, taking the load of suspicion. I kicked the fellow the other morning when I found him sleeping on his guard, while one of Mademoiselle Hetzel's horses had nearly strangled himself in a wrongly tied halter during the night. There's a motive of quarrel ready found."

"But Darrell, have you sent for the police?"

"The police! That's a good one too! Do you suppose Rixen hasn't long ago squared the patrolmen, and the Sergeant too, probably? Take it from me, a man don't break twice into the same building with impunity in a month, when things are on the square. Police! God! No, thank you. I know too much about police."

Georgy shrugged her shoulders. "Then it looks, Darrell, as though you could do nothing."

He looked at her grimly, his shoulders squared, his hands on his hips. "I *shall* do nothing," he corrected her. "Master Rixen's still parading gaily about Paris. I'd have shot him into a length of lead piping, before now — six months ago. But to-day," his voice softened, "to-day, well, I haven't only myself to think of — have I, Georgy?"

There was a note of rather anxious appeal in the last words, on which he paused as if hoping for an answer. "Guess it would be awkward for me," he went on, "to be serving time in a French prison and you waiting with Pansy to make our get-away into a new life. And I guess old Trooper there," he turned his eyes wistfully to the dead horse, "won't think too meanly of me for leaving his score unsettled on your account." He turned back to the girl, speaking a little awkwardly. "Afraid I'll be rather a lame partner for a time, Georgy. The circus has upended on me, heavy. I'm quitting, sooner than train another horse for this sort of thing. But I'll find a trade, never fear. What is there a man couldn't learn to do and do well, with you at his side? I never would have believed any man could pick himself up after a knock-out like this, just for the sake of a girl. But it's

true," he finished in a whisper, his eyes beginning to glow, the colour beginning to flow back into his cheeks; "my dear God, Georgy, it's true."

Suddenly, in a streak of scorching pain, Georgina realized that the only mercy was to give him the deathstroke of his hopes at once, before he had time to raise himself on a deceiving dream. That way, his two disasters would make but a single pain and perhaps one would numb the other. So, as he opened his lips again, she checked him.

"Darrell! Stop! I've something that must be said. Darrell, I never gave you any promise——"

"You never promised?" His voice was sharp, incredulous.

"No, Darrell, be just! I said that this morning, and not until, I'd give you my answer. I thought to give a different one, and I didn't dream I'd have to give it on top of a horror like this. But it's the only kindness I have left to show you, darling. There, read that!" She thrust Otto's letter into his hand.

He read it through; looked dazedly at the back of it; then stood aimlessly folding and unfolding it. Timidly she touched his arm. "Do you understand?" she said in a low voice.

"Oh, yes, I understand." She thought her heart would burst at the tonelessness of his voice, as though a marionette were speaking; but again she felt Pansy hugged to her breasts and the imagination strengthened her. "I understand," she heard him jerk out in the same dead voice. "The husband always wins, eh?"

"Not the husband! Dear, don't be unkind, however much I'm hurting you. I told you Otto should never come between us—but Pansy, I was never ready to leave her, and I can't, just can't. I've got to go back to her, Darrell, and this is good-bye."

He glared at her for a moment with the hunted look he had worn when she first came in; but, as he saw her standing before him, with her head bowed, sobbing quietly like a little girl that has been punished, his eyes grew tender and the manliness came into his face again.

"Georgy," he said, "I told you I understood, just now, but I lied. I was trying to misunderstand. But not any longer. It's not the husband but the kid who's won. You told me how it

would be. You've been straight and square. I think I could bear it still if there were any way left I could help you through the fearful country you've chosen."

And suddenly he found that she was weeping with her head on his breast; he put his arm round her with a protective caress in which there was no touch of passion.

He knew the moment must not be prolonged and gently lifted her away in his arms. "Come, Georgy," he whispered, with a smile that drained nearly all his courage. "It's I who've got to ask you to be the man this time. And you always are a man, aren't you? We'll say good-bye now and you'll set out on your march whistling, if you can, eh?"

She dried her eyes. "And you, Darrell? What is there in front of you?"

"Oh, you've given me back my job, all right!" Savagery blazed again out of his dark eyes and his hand felt for an absent holster at his belt.

"Darrell, no!" she cried. "You're not to kill him! I couldn't stand it!"

"You've no right, Georgy, to give me orders any longer!" he rapped back at her. She turned away with such pain in her grey eyes, already widened with suffering, that shame smote him.

"I'm sorry," he groaned. "That was damn' bad. I don't seem to know how to hold myself this morning. See now, I'll make the best amends I can. Because you ask it, that carrion kite goes free of my bullet at any rate. Maybe you'll be sorry some day you asked to have him spared for more mischief, but it's your will. I'll leave Paris this day." He paused a moment, sick at the thought of the going he had planned. Then he spoke with determination. "Yes, this day. Why wait? They can't hold me to the fag-end of my contract now." He pointed to his dead companion. "I'll see him decently disposed of before evening; it'll keep my thought off—other things. Then the night train to Cherbourg. I'll find some tramp that'll take me back to my own country, to start again."

"I'm going to London," said Georgy, "as soon as Otto writes for me."

"Queer!" Darrell smiled with a twisted lip. "I'd planned it all



out: we'd start for London together, no place like that for hiding. The horses would follow; young Pierre would have seen to it. Then we'd get a boat for America and find some job with a circus there; place swarms with 'em. It would have been too wide a comb-out to hunt you down. We'd have tented together over miles and miles of new country. . . ." He struck his forehead. "My God, I must be crazy to ramble on like this over what I've got to forget. Good-bye, George dear, the whitest woman ——"

"Oh, don't say that, Darrell. I feel such a skunk ——"

"The whitest woman, Georgy. I say it again. And I'd like you to feel I bear the kid no malice."

Georgy stepped towards him to take his held-out hand; but stopped, and, walking first to the end of the loosebox, knelt by Trooper's side, raised with an effort his heavy head, closed his staring eyes, and kissed his forehead. Then she strode bravely towards the door, where Darrell stood, like a statue, watching her. She held out her hand as she passed, with her head flung back in white, defiant courage. "Good-bye, Darrell!" she tried to say; but no sound came from her throat, choked by its great lump of tears.

7

The rain hammering on the long window panes and the gust of the spring gale wrenching at the frames for a moment drowned even the shrill voice of Jorum. Then, as the wind lulled away for a moment and the three footmen in green and gold who were serving from a side table came forward to clear the course, he resumed his broken sentence, "—— *the* most remarkable horse, Mr. Dussault, that had been seen in any circus, I don't care which you like to name, in either hemisphere, and never exhibited, sir, outside Jorum's Show. Now why did I scoop in that beast? Because, sir, I am a democrat to the backbone, and there's never a sleeping-berth partner nor a car conductor, no, nor a street scavenger, if I have the time to stop, that I don't treat as a man and a brother and try to make human contact with. If you're too proud, sir, to acknowledge God's image in the

poorest of your fellows, you're insulting the Almighty, and maybe losing one of the best bits of business that ever came to you in your life. It was a hostler, sir, in a one-horse shanty hotel by a Mississippi riverside town that put me on the trail of Thunderer — as I tell you, *the* most remarkable horse — ”

Dussault leant forward in his armchair at the head of the small oval table laid for the party of three. “Pardon me, if I interrupt, M. Jorum,” he began in his laborious, but, when he chose, remarkably correct English, “but however remarkable your Thunderer may have been, Madame here has a horse more remarkable still.”

Jorum was smearing the end of the napkin which he had tucked into his neck over his mouth, and dropped it with incredulity.

“What's that, Mr. Dussault?” A chuckle like a watch-spring breaking rattled in his chest. “You're trying, I can see, to take a rise out of the Yankee showman, eh?”

“I am perfectly serious. Madame will bear me out.”

Georgy turned her head with a start. Her eyes had strayed to the pouring window pane which blotted out the view of the house opposite. But she was not looking for that. She was seeing a grey tumbled sea and in it a small boat, rolling under the slants of rain, as it steamed out of Cherbourg Harbour for Canada. For a moment, as she tried to pick up the conversation, she looked a little dazed, and Jorum's pinpoint eyes, focussed to a sudden standstill behind the gold-rimmed glasses, took keen stock of the tall, pale woman in blue velvet with a necklace of shimmering grey stones. “She's had bad trouble since last Sunday. . . . Those opals are unlucky. . . . A fine figure; that's what the saddle does! . . . What's their game, the two of them?” were the thoughts that flitted through his mind.

Dussault smiled with a touch of pity at her distraction. “I was telling M. Jorum that we have here incognito one of the greatest ring horses in circus history. Is it not true?”

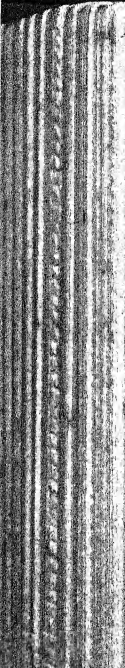
Georgy shook off her dream; the American, watching intently, saw a challenge come into her tired eyes and her mouth harden. . . .

In the hours that had passed since she left Darrell Carless,

Georgina had been occupied in fighting the worst battle, so far, of all her hard years. It had been the battle of her vitality, her youth and her ambition against the drugging despair of her broken love. At moments it had seemed as if soft arms, wound round her with a clasp she had no strength to unloose, were dragging her down, down, under waves of mingled sweetness and agony, into a gulf of shadows where there was rest. That feeling had come most fearfully upon her early this very morning when she had fled from her rooms, and with a frantic yearning for self-torture, sought the secluded bank of the lake in the Bois, now lashed with rain and deserted, where she and Darrell had paced together and fed their hopes. The impulse to fling herself under the turbid water and sleep had drawn her more and more strongly to the brink, where she tottered with the wavelets splashing over her ankles till suddenly a little lucid voice of irony within her, asking if it was to desert Pansy in this fashion that she had sent away Darrell, made her reel away from the seductive plashing and pattering, and drive her heavy feet over the soaking grass in an aimless tramp towards Longchamps.

On a sudden, as she strode along with dank hair, wetted to the skin, the surge of suffering seemed to die away and a leaden peace enveloped her. In this desolate stillness of her soul even the squalls beating on her seemed removed to a far distance. She had only a mind now, working with deliberate clearness. She had accepted the task of giving up her life for Pansy . . . Pansy, so helpless and soft . . . no, she must not think of those compensations yet . . . the waves were rising, the storm sounding louder! . . . Pansy must be just duty for the present, and for the rest of the time there would be work. She would gain forgetfulness there, not quite at once, but it would come; nothing could quite kill her passion for horsemanship, for the thrill of the arena, for the exultation of success. Success, yes, that remained, that little thing — she smiled bitterly — which she had fought her way so hard along the wearisome lane to grasp. That was the only use of it in the end, to be the little thing that would save her from lapsing into madness.

She stopped, trying to take her bearings. She must find a cab, change, and meet Jorum. "I shall fight this Yank," she mur-



mured. "He thinks he can blarney and bully a woman; he'll find whether I'm a woman any longer." A closed taxi drifted into view, coasting slowly down the squelching drive from the Porte de Madrid. He was as glad to see her as she to find him, and she was soon back at her Pension, dressing hurriedly for lunch.

Her chill resolution still supported her as Dussault's great doors swung back, and she had only a moment's following weakness. It was when her Master came forward to greet her and she was trying to say something gracious about the opals, which had been his gift to her in memory of her performance. At sight of him, the sense of his belonging to her dear past life — she recalled at this moment as though she heard it, his jovial mockery of the "untalented but fortunate young man" — the recollection of Sunday, only three days ago, when she had still love and joy to hope for, abruptly unstrung her. She trembled and her eyes filled with tears that no effort could control. Dussault gave no token of noticing her struggle; but quietly pressed her to take one of the cocktails that a servant had just brought into the room. She obeyed, and the sting of the spirit steadied her tremulous nerves just as the vast bulk of Jorum was shown through the door. Since then she had kept her calm; and now, at Dussault's signal that the time for the three-cornered duel had come, she leant forward, tense and watchful, and said to the showman, "Mr. Jorum, I have the celebrated horse, Aldebaran."

Jorum shook his head and pursed up his comedian's mouth in a smile at once genial and defiant.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I just don't know the name. That horse's fame, if it had one, never crossed the ocean to us poor New Yorkers."

"I seem, nevertheless, to remember very clearly that Stultz had a season with Aldebaran in all the big American cities some ten years ago," remarked Dussault.

"Oh! Stultz! Was that one of dear old Stultz's little stunts? You know we just hadn't time in our busy land to take them seriously. There were too many of them and they wore out our patience. There was the talking horse, whose hostler talked too loud to a bright pressman one day, and the mare with the

eighteen-foot mane, that shingled herself so cruelly in the big top before all the audience. Oh, no, we hadn't time to waste on Stultz, sir."

Dussault by a signal invited his guests to rise. "While we are taking coffee in the small salon, M. Jorum, I will show you some old cuttings that may refresh your memory."

He led the way into a cosy little sitting room, built in an angle of the back façade, with a long window looking onto the windswept garden. For the last time the powdered, green-coated footmen glided about the heavy carpet, carrying blue Sèvres coffee cups and liqueur glasses; then Dussault drew out a delicate Louis Seize table and invited Georgina and the showman to put their heads together over a leather-bound volume he took from a shelf.

The first cutting which he unfolded was from an illustrated French paper nine years old. It contained a photograph with the caption ALDEBARAN LE SAUTEUR, showing the horse bestrid-den by Stultz, the bushy-bearded Alsatian trainer, in his cocked hat and jack boots. Georgy gave an exclamation, "Patrico, of course!"

"Ah! You're convinced now, eh?" said Dussault in a low voice. "You see: I don't make mistakes. Now, M. Jorum, read this paragraph from *Le Temps*, no sensation-mongering organ, but the pillar of our solid Republican Government."

The two visitors read, Georgy with growing, merciful excitement, Jorum with alert interest. "Jumps through fiery hoops," he said at length. "That's been done often!"

"Six of them, each placed at a five-foot height?" queried Dussault, with his finger on the cutting.

"Wa-al, I'll allow that would be good; that would look well," conceded Jorum.

"Now," Dussault turned a page, "the *Temps* is a little concise on such frivolities as the circus. But the *Figaro* here tells you, M. Jorum, that Aldebaran in the same act jumped longways over a waggon and six horses taken out of the shafts and placed side by side. I think the length of the jump is given in metres."

Georgy's jaw dropped. She had never dreamed that Patrico

had such reserves of strength. Had he them still, she wondered?

"Did the man who wrote this notice know anything about horses?" enquired Jorum cunningly.

"He was my friend Baron Lamotte of the Pegasus Club," replied Dussault.

"H'm." Jorum tapped his nail with a spectacle case. His little eyes flew about restlessly: Georgy could see he was intrigued.

"Now, one more," went on Dussault, after a pause. He pointed to a slab of faded type with thick black headlines. "Aldebaran the Invincible," they ran. "Horse jumps through Burning House." "M. Stultz's triumph at the Grand Cirque."

"How was that faked?" enquired Jorum, rejecting the blurred print and appealing to Dussault.

"Fekked?" queried the Frenchman. "*Supercherie*, you mean? Trickery? There was none; I saw the feat. From the ground Aldebaran leaped in at a high window; inside he mounted a stair to a top platform, Stultz guiding him; and then leaped from the roof onto a mattress with a baby, — a puppet *bien entendu* — held in his mouth."

"And all the props aflame?"

"All crimson, M. Jorum."

"Quite an effect. But I'd have had a real babe, I think, though I'm not Herod. This horse must have been well trained, sir. Ye-ah!" He scratched his cheek with his spectacle case, and looked up. "Only one thing puzzles me." There was a singular impudence about the grin into which the predatory wings of his eagle-like nose vanished, a grin that belied in a flash the philanthropy of the silky hair and broad forehead. "This lady, you say, has this wonder horse. She's been showing, hain't she, for weeks at the Cirque d'Or? How comes it we've not heard anything the least in the world like this?" He tapped the cutting book triumphantly.

Georgina and Dussault began to speak together.

"Oh! One at a time will quite satisfy me!" said Jorum, raising gouty hands adorned with heavy red and green seal rings in a sarcastic gesture. "Only a word of explanation's needed."

Georgy signed to Dussault to speak. "I'll find you your explanation, M. Jorum," said he, "in the book." He turned over



several pages, flattened the volume at another long cutting, and held it out to Jorum.

The showman readjusted his glasses and read for awhile in silence. Then he laid down the book with more serious interest than he had yet shown this afternoon. "Wa-al, that's plumb queer," he murmured. "Durn me if that ain't a story! You know what's in here, Ma'am?" he enquired of Georgy.

"I think I can guess."

"Seems there was a plenty people keen as little knives on getting holt of this horse when his trainer gave up. And among 'em was a Britisher, answering to the name Robertshaw, who kept racing stables out yonder at Fontainebleau. One night this Britisher tells his groom, 'I am going into the forest; say nothing to any one. When you see me come back, it will be with Aldebaran.' Next morning, he's found killed—in mighty suspicious circumstances, or so they look to me—and the horse is seen by a lumberjack with a team careering hell-for-leather across the moor, never to reappear. Tell me, honest to God, M. Dussault, do *you* reckon this man got his death through ridin' Aldebaran by night through the Forest of Fontainebleau?"

Dussault shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing was proved. He may have been riding, he may not. He may not have died by accident at all."

"How do you come in then?" Jorum turned sharply round on Georgy. Briefly she told him the tale of "Patrico" and her dealings with him.

Jorum's eyes burned as he listened, and he began to sway to and fro in his seat, reminding Georgy of the swinging of Maharanee the elephant, when she was pleased. "That's great," he confessed as she finished, "that's a story. A real mystery horse, by gum! Say, I wish I had my press agent, Rory Majilton, here. He'd have seized on this like a vulture on its dinner, sir-ree. It's just full of meat. You, both of you," the little eyes bored like awls, "pledge your perfessional repytations that this Patrico and that darned Aldebaran are one and the same beast?"

"Unquestionably."

"I know it."

Dussault and Georgy spoke together.

"Now don't get in a chorus, please. That allus makes me shy." He paused. "M. Dussault, when we came in here, you vurry kindly offered me an excellent Havana. I refused, for I vurry rarely smoke. But I'll have one now, if I may, to blow out my thought channels."

He bit off the end of the cigar and puffed volleys of blue smoke through his curved nostrils. Georgy, watching him, felt she had never yet seen anything so formidable as the great nose and jaw. Then she turned her head to Dussault. "You said that Robertshaw may not have died by accident. What did you mean, Monsieur?" she asked in a whisper.

"I have not told all I know," answered the Frenchman morosely.

"Whom do you suspect?"

To her surprise the Frenchman shot a glance of pity at her. "Where ignorance is bliss — blessed' — what does your English poet say, my dear friend?" . . .

Suddenly Jorum took the cigar from his mouth and laid it by on an ashtray. "M. Dussault," he said, "I reckon I'm going to take a wide liberty. But you're a business man, sir, yourself, in a way, and as such you'll understand. Could I speak to Madam Dufay alone?"

"But certainly." Dussault rose at once. "Touch that bell when you have finished your talk and they will send for me. Till then no one will disturb you."

As soon as he heard the door close, Jorum turned to Georgy and putting a hand on each knee impressively, said, "Madam Dufay, I've got the best news in the world for you."

"Yes, Mr. Jorum?" said Georgy.

"I am going to offer you an engagement."

Georgy was silent.

"Wa-al, ain't that good?" said Jorum in an injured voice.

"I haven't heard your offer yet, Mr. Jorum."

"I'll explain, then. Seems to me, though, you hardly appreciate your good fortune, young lady. If you'd come to me yesterday, I could have offered you *nothing*. That's to a cent what you'd have been worth to Jorum. But this morning I had a cable. What's more, I'll let you see it." He took out a swollen pocket-

book and produced a blue slip. "It's from my American Manager," he explained.

Georgy read: LOLITA CRASHED PRACTICE ENGAGE RIDING LEAD MCGILVARY.

A fierce excitement sprang up in her as she read. The great Lolita had had an accident and Jorum was going to offer her the place! But she must play warily. She returned the telegram.

"That's sad news about Fritzzi Lolita, Mr. Jorum."

He waved the irrelevance aside with a thick paw. "Would you," he said solemnly, "be too nervous to take her place this summer if I asked you?"

"Nervous? Why? I won't let your patrons down, Mr. Jorum."

"Now don't you go too fast, my dear. There's conditions. First, you'll engage to do with your trick horse Patrico the very same things named in these durned sheets. . . . But can you?"

"M. Dussault has pledged himself that he will get Aldebaran back to his old form in a month."

"Good, if so be. You've about a month before you need sail. But if the horse can't do 'em all, understand, *all*, the fiery hoops, the waggon, the burning house *and* the baby, specially the baby, it's all washed right out from the start."

"He will do them, Mr. Jorum. What next?"

"Wa-al, a trick horse don't make an act. You'd be worth a deal more to me if we could incorporate that dancing stunt you did on the big black brute on Sunday night."

"Then, Mr. Jorum, I advise you to buy Ruy Blas from M. Dussault."

"Say, d'you want to bankrupt Jorum's Show before you join? Is that the tune?"

"Oh, Mr. Jorum, will your show be broken by the price of a ring horse? A thousand pounds we'd say in English money for Ruy."

"Jorum's broken by the price! Let me tell you, I've spent sixty thousand dollars on horses alone for the show this spring, and the treasury waggon don't ride specially light for that."

Georgy laughed. "Then you wouldn't notice the price of Ruy Blas at all, would you?"

Jorum grinned sourly at the trap.

"Wa-al, you need the horse, that's plain. But it will be counted when we come to fix your salary, if I have to buy him."

"That's fair; it means that I really pay and he becomes mine when I've worked off the cost," said Georgy quickly, beginning really to enjoy the duel.

Jorum sprang to his feet on the hearthrug. "Say, will you tell me whether I'm dealing with an *artiste* or a bill broker?"

"But I sha'n't work to buy and perfect horses for you, Mr. Jorum. I'm not such a novice as that! What it comes to is, you advance the price of Ruy Blas — M. Dussault won't try to profiteer out of me, I know — and I pay you back from salary. If you want ten per cent. interest on the loan, we'll reckon it out and add it to the price."

Jorum scowled. "It'll take you quite a day to repay a thousand pounds British, say five thousand dollars, from *your* salary."

"Oh, but surely not. Lolita used to get a hundred pounds a week in London at the Stadion, she told me. You wouldn't give her less than a hundred and fifty pounds, say eight hundred dollars a week, in America."

"Say nix! What's Lolita's salary to you, Miss, anyway?"

"Well, it's mine, if I take her place."

Jorum seized a chair and dragged it close to Georgy's. Then he sat down, wiped his brow with a yellow silk handkerchief and beamed at her from all over his moonlike face with an air of immense tenderness. "Say now, Madam Dufay! Let me speak vurry kindly to you. You don't want to throw away the biggest chance that ever came to a young 'ooman by what you'll forgive an old grandfather for calling silliness. I don't blame you for trying to hold up your end of the price. Oh, no, I like your spirit! But you mustn't let that vurry handsome head of yours, that I want terribly to see under my big top, get turned right round. Jest you lookee here! Madam Lolita's a world-wide repytation; she's a bareback rider; that's miles harder than anything you've been trained to do; she brings her own fine horses. Is it reasonable to expect her salary, at starting?"

"As to the reputation, Mr. Jorum, it's quickly made in your show. That a bareback rider's cleverer than I am, I'd be a conceited fool to deny; still *haute école* is an art and I've worked at

it. I bring you one most remarkable horse, as you know, and I pay you for the other."

"Yes; that's all very good;" he smiled at her indulgently with half-closed eyelids, "and you'll come with me for three hundred dollars."

"Nonsense, Mr. Jorum."

He sat up stiffly, as one who had never been so addressed before. Then his brow blackened; his chin jerked forward; the veneer of philanthropy dropped off, leaving the bully of the lot revealed. He struck his fist on the table, making the little glass ash tray jump and spill its contents.

"Do you think Jorum's going to bargain with any one?" he roared.

"You needn't with me," said Georgina, facing him as she would have faced a menagerie beast. "I'll take Madame Lolita's salary or nothing."

He got up with his jowl still working in an ugly fashion, and walked his high-shouldered walk on his little feet to the mantel-piece. Then he turned and faced her, plunging his hands into his trouser pockets. "Take a little time to think it over," he said.

"I'm sorry," said Georgy, "I've no time to give. If we can't agree, Mr. Jorum, and it doesn't look like it, I shall wire Krauss to-night and accept Berlin."

"That's only a three months' offer," he said, with his head on one side.

"If you've been making enquiries into Mr. Krauss's affairs" — began Georgy.

"Not much that fails to percolate to L. J. Jorum's ears," he said boastfully.

"I'm glad; it'll show you I'm not bluffing."

"Say, I don't know when I ever met a gal like you in all my born — Let's have done with it. You've found me in a hole, consequent on Lolita's crashing, and I'll go the five hundred. There!"

"Eight, Mr. Jorum!"

"That the only word in your vocabulary, Madam Dufay?"

"Just now, yes."

"Vurry good." He sank into an armchair by the hearth. "It's

been a great pleasure to make your acquaintance and a delightful luncheon at this grand antique Hotel. I seem to remember our kindly host spoke of touching a bell pull when our chat was over. Can you see it, anywhere?"

Georgy shifted her chair a little. "Just by my hand here. Shall I pull it, Mr. Jorum?"

"I'd be obleeged. . . . That is, if you've nothing else to say to me, Madam Dufay."

"I don't know of anything. Shall I ring?"

"Thank you."

She pulled down the bell pull. There was a pause, filled by the moaning of the wind. Then quiet footsteps came along the passage and a powdered head appeared in the doorway.

"*Madame désire* ——" enquired the flunkey.

"M. Dussault ——" began Georgy.

"One moment, Madam Dufay," broke in Jorum suavely. He turned to the footman. "My friend," he said, "M. Dussault kindly asked us to ring for anything we might want. I find I have nowhere a single match to light up my cigar again." . . .

Twenty minutes later, Jorum rose from the writing table, where he had been scribbling in his thick black handwriting on a sheet of Dussault's notepaper, and switched on an electric lamp, for the despairing day was closing early in wet gloom.

"Read it through," he said; "mind you, it's only initialled till I'm satisfied your horse can do the tricks and save the baby. Then we'll have it drawn out in form and witnessed. Otherwise I guess you'll find it all right."

Georgy took it and read, fingering her opals. "Don't," said Jorum hastily, "don't touch them damned stones while you're reading your first contract with me."

Georgy smiled absently at his superstition and went on closely studying the draft. But it was hard to keep the writing steady before her eyes. The first words, "An Agreement between JORUM'S SHOW on the one part and GEORGINA KATHLEEN RIEGELMANN professionally known as GEORGINA DUFAY on the other, for a leading riding act", were too intoxicating. They spelt the climax of her career, reached, she could not help reflecting with pride, in a surprisingly short time; they meant victory in her duel with the



mighty impresario; they promised, too, if not a solution, at least an alleviation of her difficulties at home. For with this position and salary she would unquestionably have the whip hand of Otto. He would dare no more heroics; he would look to her, not to Pansy for his feed; she would possess her daughter, educate and train her to her own mind. In sum, it was everything that she had wanted . . . and it was all utterly valueless to her, ashes in the mouth.

She laid the sheets down on the table, took up Dussault's long black ebony penholder, and affixed her initials with a lack of interest. Then she straightened herself wearily and stood looking past the yellow lamp onto the masses of deep-blue shrubbery twisting in the wild wind outside the window. A drip of rain from a gutter came tap, tap, tapping at the window as if entreating attention, and suddenly the latch creaked as if a gentle, firm hand were trying to open it. How could she torture herself in this childish fashion? she thought, as she tried to tear herself away. But she stayed still, seeing again the wide tumbled sea; and now there was no ship at all on the grey waste; it had passed below the horizon of her fancy. She turned back towards the room, where Jorum stood, puffing at his cigar and looking curiously at her. On a sudden the uncontrollable trembling seized her again; and to her shame she realized that she was sobbing helplessly and blinding her eyes with tears.

"My dear," she heard Jorum saying, "I can see you're in the greatest trouble; it's been bothering me all this afternoon. It was why I couldn't be hard on you in our negotiations. Say, can't I advise you — as a friend?"

"It's nothing, Mr. Jorum; you must excuse me," she murmured, pulling a handkerchief from her bag. "I think I'm not well. I must say good-bye to M. Dussault and be off."

"Wait a minute. If you won't let *me* be your counsellor, you know where to go for help, don't you?"

She looked at his solemn face, bewildered. "The Book," he said, and diving into an inner pocket brought out a worn black Testament. "That's my companion," he said, "my adviser and my friend. I never go a step without it." He balanced the little volume on his immense palm lovingly. "At my home in Rhode Island,"

he said, "I've the grandest collection of Holy Writ any private owner, or many institootions, can catalogue. I have the Blessed Word in every language, in copies from every age, some in old vellum, some with mediaeval illuminations bright as Broadway nightsigns. I've a codex that's a manooscript, my dear — that my agent brought back from a Coptic monastery with five fine dromedaries that I showed in my winter season at Noo York to upwards of ten thousand people a day, — a codex your British Museum folk have been trying to get from me for the last fifteen years and won't — if they try for the next fifty! But I'd part with any rather than this Testament my old mother the widow gave me, the year before I ran away from her. The preachers, they used to say the Almighty he had no use for shows and showmen, but I ask you, if so, why is there so much about shows in the Blessed Word? Take that question about free passes that has troubled me mightily. I open the Word and what do I find? "Suffer not a man to pass," and I never have, always exceptin' the Press, without they pay. Nothing about shows in the Word, eh? But who was the first Wild Beast Keeper on the globe? Old Man Noah, who travelled one Showboat, designed by the Almighty himself, with the greatest and only Menagerie then on Earth. Who tells us that in the Glory City there'll be four beasts, a lion, a calf, one with a man's head, and one a flying eagle, each with six wings and all talking in human voices? Gee! I've never showed the like myself, or I'd have been able to retire long since on my savin's. There was a preacher in a church on Madison Avenue that came to me one spring and said, 'Mr. Jorum, I reckon you ought to lay by your Show now and think of your soul.' 'Preacher,' I says, 'will you be bound by God's Holy Word?' 'Sure,' says he, 'that's my calling.' So I opens the blessed volume and shows him the words, 'To your tents, O Israel!' and says I, 'Though my name's not Levy, nor yet is it Isaacsohn, the Divine Command goes with L. J. Jorum too.' Now, before we ring for that good M. Dussault, that'll be thinking, I'm afeared, we've both died in our shoes, you and me'll sit down quietly and I'll read you the Twenty-third Psalm; that's what will comfort you."

He led her to a chair, and sitting at her elbow, began to read

the Psalm in a deep, chanting voice. In the middle she started and interrupted him.

"Why, those must be the words they put in Latin on my mother's tombstone. I'm sure I remember them."

"Which ones were they? Oh, these, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.' Yes."

He broke off suddenly and closed the Bible. "My dear, may I give you a word of advice? Throw away them stones you're wearing round your neck. They can't but bring you bad luck some day."

"My opals?" Georgy put a protecting hand across them. "But they're lovely, Mr. Jorum. I couldn't be so rude to M. Dussault who gave them to me."

"Never you mind who gave 'em. Get rid of 'em, *pronto*. Your best friend will bring you a hoodoo with 'em unknowing."

"I don't think, Mr. Jorum, there's much more bad luck left to pour out on me. Anyway, I'll chance it."

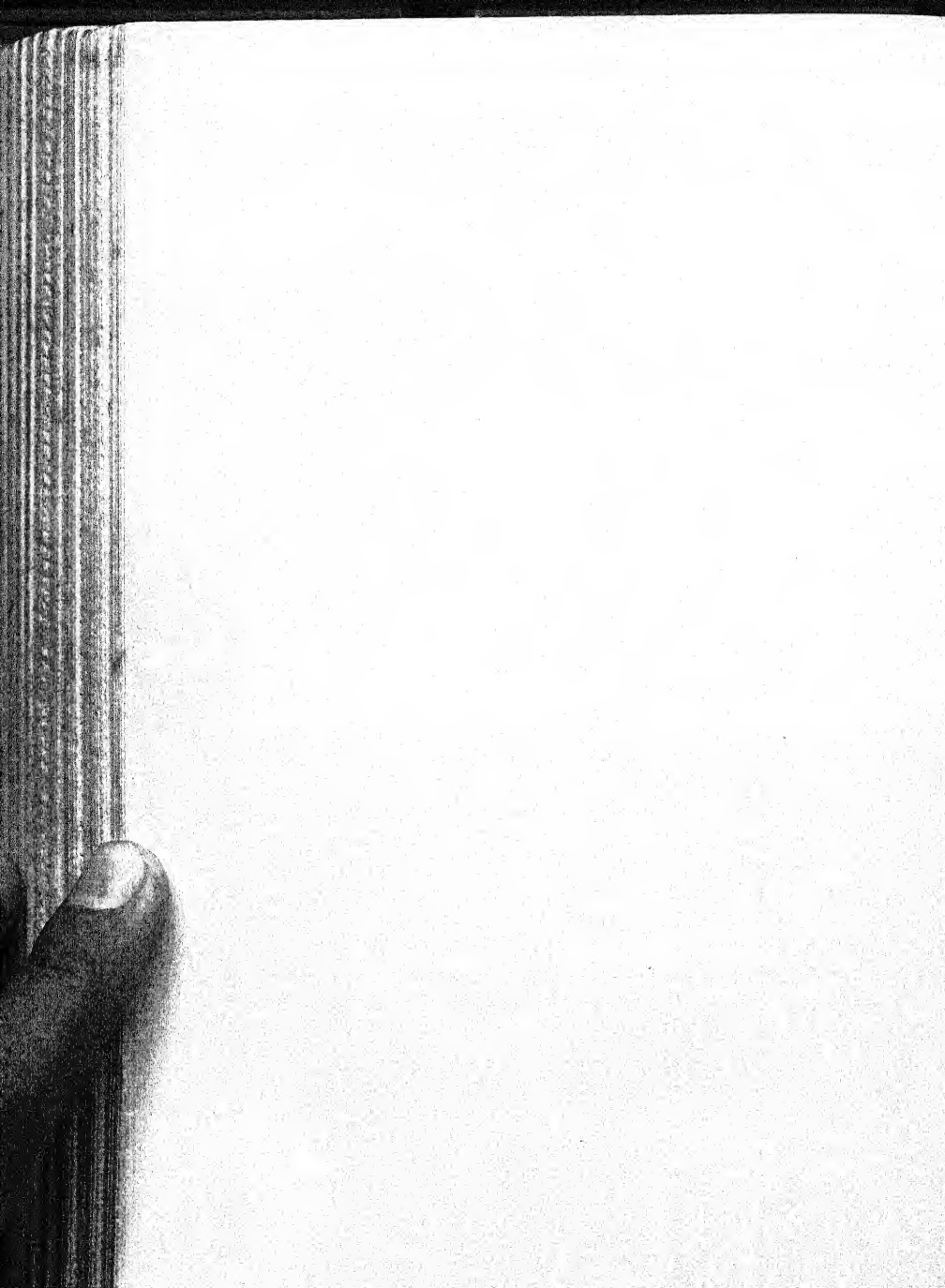
Jorum threw up a protesting hand, just as the door was thrown open and Dussault's impatient head appeared.

"*'Quand aurez-vous fini de conter votre histoire?'* —" he declaimed from *Hernani*. "Haven't you done yet?" He paused awestruck at the sight of Jorum's Bible and uplifted hand. "Oh! *Bon Dieu*. You conclude with prayer even a contract in your countries? I'll leave you to it!"

He made for the door again, but Jorum stood up and cried after him in an announcer's voice, "No, sir, come back, I beg. Resist the Devil and he'll hop out of the window! M. Dussault, meet the dandy little rider that's going to be the start of Jorum's Show across the pond this season."

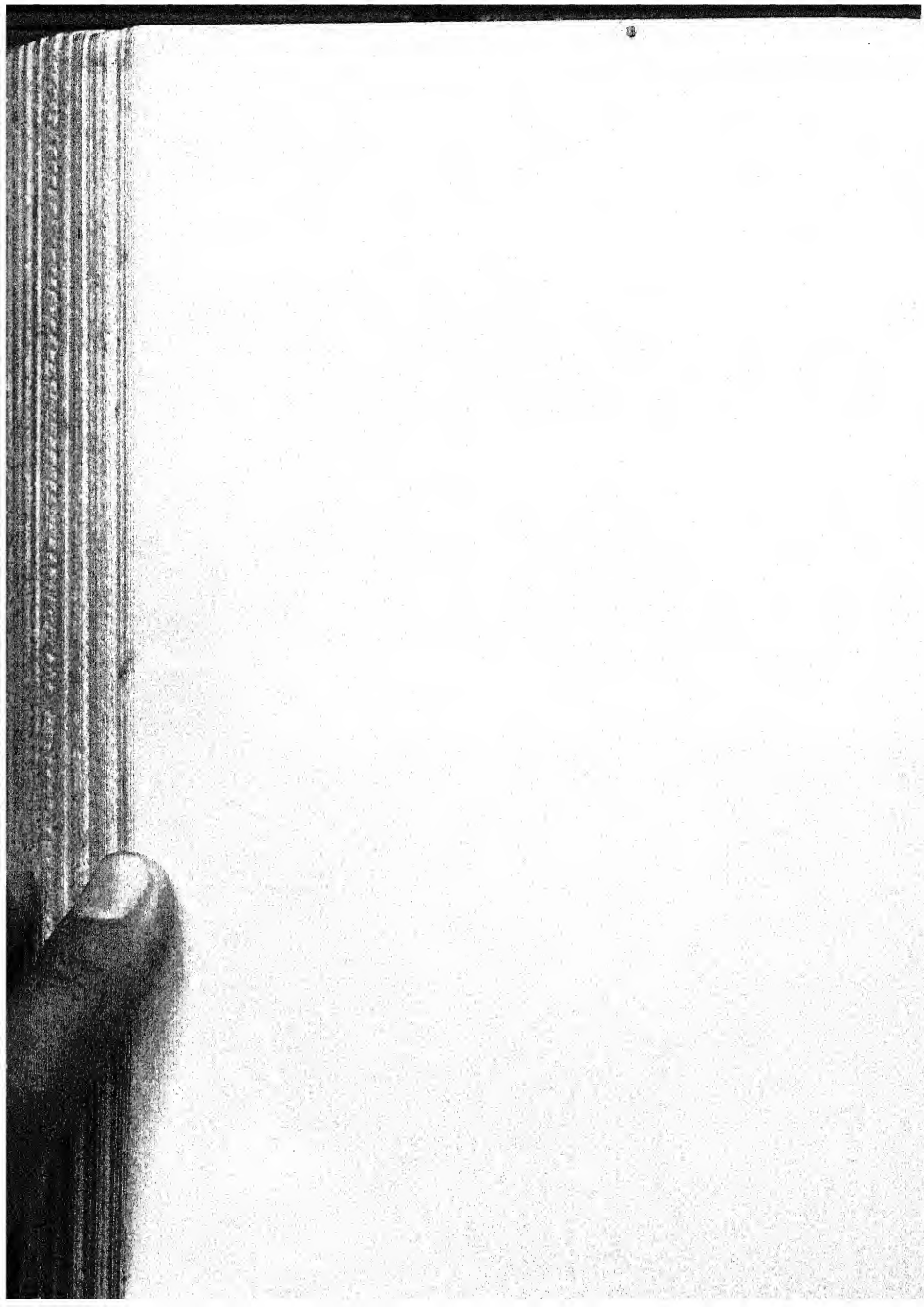
"*Vrai?*"

Georgy nodded and Dussault seized her hands and kissed them. "What did I tell you?" he cried. "What did I say? You are going with Jorum to America."



BOOK THREE

AMERICA





## CHAPTER ONE

### I

HALF-PAST three of a midsummer morning: the sinking moon hangs, a large glittering orb, over a ridge tipped with spruce, sharpening to a knife-edge the black belt of foliage, and marking the outlines of a wide empty field on the borders of a North-west American town. In spite of her defiant stateliness, there is the whisper of dawn in the air; the dark is thinning to greyness; a cock stretches his neck in a hidden farmyard and his jubilation is answered by other distant buglers across the valley; trembling between the trees that bound two sides of the vast oblong tract, a light or two spring up in the farms.

Now along the main road from the town that skirts the third side of the unfenced sweep, the whir and jar of a motor are heard, and two flaming yellow headlights speed into view, check and send their fans gliding inwards over the rough grass, as a light lorry leaves the metal and bumps slowly towards the middle of the field. A lank leg slides down from beside the driver's seat, and a tall man in patched flannel trousers and a brown cardigan, with a bulging cap piled over one eyebrow, stalks out and looks about him with a careful gaze. The dawn is winning fast; ashen grey, the moon shrinks behind the spires of the spruce; over in the east a pink stain creeps into the slate sky, while, opposite, the smoky wraiths of distant mountain peaks disclose themselves. Half a dozen men in shirt sleeves have tumbled out of the lorry and stand stretching their arms; a dog jumps down and barks rapturously, awakening a savage clamour of hounds from a house on the edge of the sunk track on the fourth side of the field. "Cut it!" growls a savage voice, and the uproar ceases, to

give place to a chirping of wakened birds all round the wooded fringes of the expanse. The workmen lounge towards their tall leader where he stands calculating with both hands arched over his eyes. They watch silently, and in the stillness there comes from the road a steady rumble and jolt, prolonged in the distance with a sound like far-away thunder. One of the men turns his head and watches a team of six grey horses harnessed to an immense red waggon halt on the edge of the grass. Behind loom more horses and towering shapes of strange vans. At the same moment the leader stoops and drives a wooden pin with a blue pennon into the turf.

"Menagerie first centrepole!" he says briefly. "Tape!" There is a whirl as the white tape spins out from its round case, held over the pin by an assistant. The leader marches fifty feet, holding the tape, stoops again and drives another pin; his trained helpers space themselves out to right and left, marking the sidewalls with more tiny blue flags. The tapes whirl intermittently, and in the intervals the jolting along the road continues; the whole field is lined now with waiting waggons and teams, while, fantastic at the end of the frieze, cluster the shaggy humps of dromedaries and, drowned in the shadow of drooping branches behind, the heaving grey bulk of elephants.

The leader of the lay-out gang straightens his back from planting a last pin and glances round his men. "Hello! Seven of you?" he says quickly. "Where d'you drop from, Mister Hobo?" An extra man has, in fact, joined himself unobtrusively to the group, a thick-set figure, with a stiff, bent leg. "Been camping in the tall, I guess, Liv," suggests a worker, jerking his thumb towards the copse on the border of the field.

"Well, can't you speak, guy?" demands the leader irately.

The tramp limps forward on his bent leg, and a husky voice comes from under a filthy black felt hat-brim. "You're Jorum's lay-out gang, ain't you? Want a hand?"

An electric torch flashes in the leader's fist and throws a ring of cold light on two pale eyes, worn, it seems, to a set weariness and hopelessness, on a face set in harsh folds, with the protruding cheekbones of starvation, and a fringe of ragged grey beard thrust forward on an aggressive chin.

"Nopel!" The Boss Canvasman clicks the light off, relegating the wild visage to the shadowy morning glimmer. "We don't hanker after your sort, grandad. Guess it's time you was layin' out your coffin measurements."

"I'll bet I'll drive a stake better than half a dozen of your Johnny Raws, here," retorts the hobo defiantly.

"Betcha," scoffs the canvasman. "Drive a steak 'tween your gums in the cook tent, more like. Git! Drive yourself off the lot, d'you hear?"

The tramp shambles a few paces into the background as if complying, and the impatient Canvas Boss turns his eyes towards the road. Already workmen with beams, jacks and hammers have made a secure planking over the drainage ditch between the road and the lot, and the waggons are driving across it, spreading out fanwise as they reach the grass like trained artillery teams. Some fifty yards from the blue flags the menagerie canvas waggons stand halted with a fresh battalion of shirt-sleeved hands lined up under assistant bosses beside them. Meanwhile, at the other rim of the lot, a canvas marquee already shines in the broadening light; cooks in white cap and apron run to and fro; huge tin boilers are being unloaded from a van and there is a rattle of crockery. All over the expanse men are running or pacing forward in groups under heavy packages; little tents are jerking up; there rise shouts and hammerings. And on the road, filling the place vacated by the first trainload of waggons, there is now ranked another long line of cars, stretching out of view, huge decorated coaches and chariots, some of them, others heavy cages with iron bars. The morning beams glint on the buckles of the harness, on a monster green and gold oyster-shell curving over the back of an allegorical parade-car, on the white teeth of a Negro driver. A lion's roar booms out over the quiet countryside and a troop of hyenas set up a shrill yapping; their keepers still them with cries.

The Boss Canvasman blows a fierce blast on a whistle. "Hurry, you sons of Satan!" he yells. "Shake them lousy legs of yourn. Say, didn't the Pullman conductor call you this morning, gentlemen?" Liv Raincy had a touch of the Indian in his lithe, loose limbs and in the matted black locks that fell over his forehead,

as well as in the brown tinge beneath the perennial dirt of his skin. Indian, too, were his little black eyes, with their cynical humour and reckless criminal flare. He maintained authority over his gang of savage toughs of all nationalities by his voice, of which the rasping yelp could drown a steam calliope, by his skin-flaying sarcasms, hurting worse than fists, and by his easy indifference to all that went on among his men out of working hours. "Guess I ain't paid to be your eyes and nose," he would tell the circus detective, when he came round the canvas squad to search effects or prosecute enquiries, and the detective resentfully knew that a hint had probably been dropped hours before his coming to Raincy's incriminated lamb, whoever he might be.

Now at his whistle the canvasmen rushed forward in an orderly swarm; the waggon-drivers cried "Hep!" to the great horses, as they trundled round with the heavy rolls of canvas to their appointed quarters; and as Raincy slung his loose limbs over to begin the big top lay-out, with red-flagged pegs this time, the tall centre poles of the menagerie tent began to rise slowly into the air, tugged by straining gangs, and to the chant of "R-o-o-l her!" the bales of grey canvas were spread out on the grass, to be laced together and attached to the guy-ropes.

"Where's that Gawd-blistered stake and chain waggon?" enquired Raincy affably as he skirted back along the menagerie top. There was a rush of men to a waggon from which they carried back armfuls of heavy wooden stakes, while others bore enormous sledge hammers on their shoulders. "Swing them sledges!" rasped Raincy. "Don't stand starin' for the cookhouse flag: I won't let your breakfast get cold, mother's boys." There was a shower of claps and thuds as the sledges drove viciously onto the line of stakes all round the outer rim of the canvas.

Suddenly a hoarse voice spoke in Raincy's ear. "Call that stake-driving? I could 'a set six while that skinny galoot of yours is fumbling with his thumbs!"

The Boss turned his head and saw the dilapidated tramp standing at his elbow, with a look of scorn on his beaten face. Then he switched his fierce eyes in the direction the hobo was pointing and saw a young rustic who had run away from his farm to join the circus at the last stand awkwardly knocking his stake

sidelong. "Say, tottering Willie," he roared, "do you think you're a lady's dentist, maybe, tapping at a hollow tooth with your lily mitts? Get over with you, you spider-legged cripple, and help Jeff with the quarter-pole guys. Jump to it, Charlie!" The pink-faced hobbledohoy flushed scarlet at his tone and humped his ill-jointed adolescent frame towards the tangle of ropes and cursing men indicated by the Boss, with an evil scowl at his traducer. Liv Raincy swung round to the tramp, who was grinning sourly through a gap in his yellow teeth. "Now, guy, we'll see you sling a sledge," he ordered.

The tramp stooped, picked up the heavy hammer with a muscular arm, tapped the stake deftly into position, swung the sledge with a grunt and in a few clattering strokes had it driven fair and firm into the soil. "Next," said Raincy impassively, and a second and third were planted with equal mastery. A relenting smile stole over the Boss's leathern jaw. "Old-timer, eh?" he said. "All right! No questions is the law of the lot, I guess. Get along quick now with the rest of the line and let me find you swinging it when I come back. P'raps you don't know my mother gave me a spare ocular at the back of my neck?"

He slouched away again towards the big-top lay-out, where nearly a hundred men were unrolling the immense centre and end pieces that covered the grand marquee where the performance would be given, while a small motor-driven engine pulled on the wide cables that raised the waist-thick masts to support the roofing and the overhead apparatus. Liv Raincy's chief assistant, a giant Irishman with a chin the size almost of his whole upper face, was directing from the centre in a stream of melodious blasphemy. Round and round through the thumping, the swishing, the shouting and singing the Boss Canvasman walked with his gimlet eyes; then veered back to the menagerie tent on which the big top would abut when raised. "Say, what in hell's this?" he bellowed. He had come upon the old-timer at the end of a row of firmly and neatly driven pegs, gasping painfully with his hands upon his knees, his hammer on the ground. "Didn't I say to swing that sledge till I got round again?" he demanded. The old man gave a deep expectoration; then with a wry grimace hit his stomach with his hand and shook his head. Raincy soft-

ened a little. "That the way, eh? When did you eat last?" The tramp murmured something inaudible. "Missed your after-theatre supper, anyway, I guess." He looked over towards the cook tent, where a small flag now hung on the top. "Flag's up," he said encouragingly. "Stand aside, old son of a flea-bitten she-dawg, till we raise her; then we'll all go to breakfast."

He hailed the assistant the other side and was met by an answering shout. There was an order, a trampling of men pulling away on ropes, a squeaking of pulleys and the great canvas top of the menagerie tent, shining like a swan's back in the bright sunlight, sailed up, gently bellying against the blue above. There was a rush to secure and tighten the guys all round; then Raincy's whistle blared and with a joyous howl the crew of both tops dropped their tools and poured across the flat to the cook tent. As they went, they passed the massive wild-beast cages, drawn by long teams, thudding over the turf to take position in the menagerie, and the elephants lurching along behind, the first three with leather-covered pads strapped across their foreheads in order to shove the wheeled cages into place as soon as the teams and shafts were removed.

Round a waggon by the cook-tent door the labourers clamoured and pushed, flourishing their meal tickets. "Don't know *you!*" snapped the cook's clerk, as the old hobo presented himself at the opening. "Stake him, Micky, on my squad," sang Liv Raincy, as he swung through to take his place at the boss's table, and the old man stumped on, jostled by the stream, into the tent.

Within, the steam of the great urns, the smell of frying meats, the pervasion of unwashed clothing and sweaty bodies made a heady atmosphere that reinforced the pandemonium of some three hundred men shouting at each other, roaring at the rushing nigger waiters, and noisily storming their places at the long, clean-washed wooden trestles. At one end a gang was chanting a favourite road song in deafening cadence; in another corner a group pelted one another with chunks of bread, till the white-capped head cook came out from behind the ovens and bawled threats at them. Liv Raincy, at the more roomy Boss's table, set his elbows on the board and grinned as usual at any indiscipline outside



his own job. Yet another trio could not wait the few moments before their food arrived without laying dirty playing cards on a corner of the board. The whole long canvas room was a surge of strong shoulders in pink, grey and blue shirts, fair-haired, godlike youths jostling elbows with unshaven, beetle-browed crooks: there an Italian with warm tint and bluish eyebrows, there a golden-bearded Swede, there a whiskered Jew, nodding and grinning as if straight from the stage of a New York vaudeville show; a little farther on the black splodge of a Negro's head.

The old tramp seemed unperturbed by the uproar and the smell, the pushing of men hurrying in and hurrying away as their meal finished. He waited for no guidance, but stumped straight for a vacant place at the nearest table, lifting his stiff leg over the bench just in time to steal the seat from another man who was racing for it and turned away with an oath to seek a fresh place. Next him, as he sat down, the old-timer perceived the lean rustic he had jockeyed out of his job before breakfast; the two exchanged glowering looks without speaking. "Steak and bacon for you?" cried a nigger waiter in a white jacket, plumping down without waiting for an answer a tin plate piled high with meat and smoking fried potatoes, and making off before howls of "Bring us a fried chicken, damn you, flunkey!" "Say, is that cawfee-berry ground yet, Jack Johnson!" "Wheedle them fowls to lay a bit quicker, for land's sake!" A tall tin mug clattered onto the table beside the old-timer, and into it splashed a spout of scalding, fragrant coffee poured by another Negro glistening with perspiration. The old man shot out his hand quickly and grabbed the mug away from the yokel, his neighbour, who swore shrilly at the nigger. Then he settled down to his meal, without haste or eagerness, feeding himself slowly, steadily, with intense concentration. Thus engaged, he seemed to pay no concern to the swirl of jesting, arguing and quarrelling that passed over his head.

"Short of hands, this season, ain't we?" cried a voice.

"Yep, they're digging up all the cemeteries for 'em, I'm told," came the reply.

"Ever draw a king-beaver yourself?" enquired another.

"Shucks! What are yuh talking of? Where ever was yuh

reared? Don't yuh know that dude rig's obligatory on the British whenever they dine with the Prince of Wales?"

The old man raised his head and grabbed at the white jacket of a scurrying waiter. "Another steak!" he said fiercely, and till it came sat silent, his tired eyes staring vacantly before him.

The conversation shifted its quarter as the Boss Hostler, in short trousers pulled over cowboy boots, strode into the tent and flung his whip down on the reserved table with a swear-word and, "Gawd send me a show next season with no blasted lady-riders! Here, Jim Crow, where's my special?" A Negro hurried up to him with a stiff gin and bitters, just as a small man in groom's leggings with greying hair and a worried, egg-shaped face slipped into a vacant seat opposite the old-timer.

"What's the break, Bunt?" asked a canvasman. "Your boss seems rattled."

The little groom gave a long sniff of exasperation.

"It's enough to break a man's heart," he protested. "Gee, that Dame Dufay oughta travel a stable of her own. You'd think not one of us hostlers from Lariat downwards knew a hoss from a dromedary, way she blows it off on us."

"Say, did Dame Georgina dare throw her weight up against Lariat Bill?" The canvasman chuckled.

"I should smile," answered the groom. "'Y'ought to be keepin' a livery stable in Arkansaw,' says she. 'I wish to Hell I was, lady,' he tells her, 's'long as I had *Gents Only Attended to* on the sign-board.' 'Sif he could help her bloody piebald scratching his nose on the cyar. Reckon she should a took the point up with the switchman for flaggin' us sich an ungentlemanly hurried way."

"Why weren't you looking after her stock? You're allotted to her section, hain't you?"

"You don't need to remind me whom I'm allotted to, thank you. I'd rather have the job of currycombing the performing fleas than dancin' to her tantrums. She expects to see a hoss tent in the season look like her winter boudoir, durn my boots."

"All same," interposed a gruff, spade-bearded man who had been recruited from a mining camp, "you and Lariat are a pair of mutts to tangle with her. She's one of Jorum's pets; guess he loves her more than the bearded lady or any other of his freaks."

"The Dufay one o' Jorum's pets!" cried the canvasman derisively. "Why, they was writin' one against the other in the Noo York papers all last fall."

"That was along of her starting a season of her own," explained the groom, "trying to wipe up his winter show at Harrison Gardens. I'll say it was rough on the old thief, seeing she'd trouped with him for four years running and in a sorta way he'd made her name."

"Huh!" the miner snorted scornfully. "I guess it's each for himself in this trade; Jorum ain't no philanthropist."

"No," assented the groom, "I'll allow as fur as that he's a strictly moral man. But, turn it as you like, what the Dufay says goes on this lot; you ain't wrong there."

The young rustic abruptly thrust his sharp elbow into the old tramp's ribs, spilling his third mug of coffee onto his tattered shirt and scalding his bare breast below. "Say, are you deaf!" he whined. "I've axed you three times to sling that bread-basket along my way." The old man started and turned his head slowly from the speakers to his assailant.

"Looking for trouble, my lad, what?" he rumbled in a voice stronger for his ample meal, and spun the bread-basket contemptuously along.

"You can have all the trouble you want!" snarled the rube, laying thick slabs of butter on his slice.

The old man did not answer, but seemed to sink again into his stupor, with his ears however pricked to the conversation on his left.

"No, she couldn't not have pulled it off, so there!" asseverated the canvasman. "Not every kinker's born a manager. Also, she won't spare a glad glance for the sheikhs, and that's the way a female star gets dimmed, let me tell you. M'reover, if she had Master Otto in the ticket waggon, I'll lay there was a powerful leakage in the receipts." A general laugh and hoot corroborated him. "She's better in her tent again, letting old man Jorum do the worryin'."

"We ain't any better though," said the groom peevishly. "I'd as lief be an enlisted man with a sergeant I could sass back to, if I cared to be jailed for it."

"Cut it out," said the ex-miner. "I've heerd you bless her dainty footsteps last day of season, when she handed you your dope."

"Yeah, she ain't stingy, I'll say, though she's such a fusser. Still it beats me what Jorum sees in her."

"Make no mistake there!" cried the canvasman. "Jorum'd need comb this continent, and Urope too, damn close before he'd find another wench that don't give a curse for her bones or neck like the Dufay."

"Why can't he leave the sudden-death stuff to the men? Guess I hate to see a woman chancing it thataway, even her!"

"The gillies in front don't agree with you, sirree!" declared the miner. "You watch the rows. They find a special snap to the cock-tail when there's a chance to see a woman hand in her checks with violence."

"Happen they will see it one day. Piebald'll kick her silly brains out one show doing that durnfool Captive's Escape ride — hanging with her head 'bout six inches from his hoofs over them rock-jumps," reflected the canvasman.

"You just can't talk to her, not no one can't," said the groom sourly. "Seems she thinks she's gotta sort of a charm to her life. And yet, would you believe it, she wears opals to her glad rags in Noo York any night she hashes with Otto uptown at a restaurant."

"Maybe," said the miner, "them stones is lucky with some. She's reason to trust her luck. Any of you guys there the day the horse pyramid crashed with her? They shot three horses afterwards and there was a groom kicked so they dursn't show him to his wife before he was nailed down; another both arms broke. The Dufay crawled out from under eighty hoofs withouten one bruise. I reckon you may call that luck."

"Come to that," added the canvasman, "'twas a mighty close squeak with the balloon horse last spring. Two ropes sprung and the platform tip-tiltin' sixty feet up in the top; no net, betcha life, or the gillies save their dime."

"No," said the groom meditatively. "I reckon that warn't luck so much as horsemanship. She was as cool as iced water and pitched her weight on his forehead so's he shouldn't slide back, while they lowered just as quick as they dare. Gee, that wop,

Umberto, was sweatin' tallow onto his white breeches. I never seen a ring director look so mean."

"You folks is all wrong," came a fresh voice from a little lower down, and the men turned scornful faces to see an aged Negro with a goatlike face solemnly blinking at them. "You-all won't never see that Dame come to grief. Foh why? Sho', she's a witch." There was a loud jeer. "Yes, folk, I'm tellin' you the sutt'n truth. The Debble give her that black an' white hoss fo' her familiar. I've heerd her talkin' night af'er night to him in the little hoss tent. That ain't nat'ral, folks. So long as she has the great black and white hoss, there ain't no danger fo' her, neither to life nor limb. But one fine night the Debble he come and take the hoss away: then —"

"Oh, stow it! Cut it out, Sambol!" came a good-natured chorus, and as if by some prearranged signal, a shower of crusts, bacon rinds, chicken bones, lumps of sugar pelted onto his protesting black head.

"Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Jump, you flat-bellied loafers! Guess I'd prefer to see the big top up before first show starts!" Liv Raincy had risen abruptly from the game of dice he was playing with the Boss Hostler and his appalling screech cut through the babble and silenced it. His men seized hats and caps and tumbled for the door. "You too, I mean, Gentleman Joel!" he roared, as he passed the old tramp, who was still sitting as if drowned in reverie, and who now rose stiffly, looking around and furtively sweeping under his jacket a couple of rolls, which he was made to disgorge at the doorway by an alert watcher from the cook's department.

Outside the cook tent the whole scene during the twenty minutes of breakfast had changed almost out of recognition. What had been a bare field was now a city of canvas and grouped wag-gons, shutting out the view of distant hills and woods. It was silent save for hammerings and workmen's calls, and sparsely inhabited but for passing groups of plainly dressed men and women, and small family parties cooking their breakfasts. In fact, it was still awaiting its real population. The small private sideshows lined a broad route that had been kept clear from the public high-road to the group of great tents in the centre. In front of the menagerie tent, with its two branches to right and left, the Mu-

seum of Historical Paintings and Sculpture and the Waxwork Congress of Statesmen and Nations (Jorum ever stressed the educational value of his show), there already arose the huge carved wood front, gaudy with gilt and paint, and bearing on its arched top the name of JORUM in electric bulbs that would gleam out in four colours at nightfall. Already in the main alley there paced up and down a pair of flat-capped town policemen, swinging their clubs from straps round their wrists.

For a moment the old tramp stood blinking at the spectacle; then the young yokel with two or three sympathizers, who had hung round the doors till Liv Raincy had passed, approached him with a threatening look. "I reckon you can git now," he said. "I aim to keep my job, you bilker. You ain't needed here. Skip to the tall while you're skin's not broken."

The fierce chin and ragged beard stuck out. "And what if I aim to stay, my lad, what then?" demanded the old-timer.

The rustic thrust his long horselike head under his snub nose. "Why then, I 'low you'll cop what's coming to you."

His friends closed in round the pair, "Not here, Andy, behind the tent," they murmured.

Wonderful is the wireless that transmits the rumour of a fight. Already the crowd had swollen to nearly fifty from the neighbouring tents and booths. "Mind them bulls," said a warning voice, and many heads turned to watch the receding backs of the policemen at the far end of the alley. Then, gently shoving, with Andy vociferously explaining his grievance and the old hobo stumping stolidly along in the middle, the throng bore the two combatants round out of sight behind the cook tent. Promptly a swarm of capped cooks and nigger waiters skipped out of the doors and followed round to the back.

Rushing down the big alley, his small black eyes flaming devilishly, came the Boss Canvasman. "Where them damned bums?" he roared to the chief cook, who had appeared in the doorway to the tent.

"Round the back," answered the functionary, grinning. "There's a little fight," and as he spoke the crowd behind gave a long roar of excitement.



"Fighting!" screeched Raincy. "And the big top still on the floor! I'll fight 'em," and out of his trouser pocket came a small black automatic.

"Slow down on that hardware, Liv!" cautioned the cook. "You got to show cause, remember. Why, I guess it's over already." A loud shout had gone up and the crowd began to flow back round the corner of the tent, cheering and laughing and waving hats. Presently, surrounded by well-wishers clapping him on the shoulders, appeared the old tramp, stumping along unconcernedly as before.

The laughter and cheers died away abruptly as the crowd saw the figure of Liv Raincy standing with humped shoulders and twisting lips. The sideshow owners dispersed promptly about their business, the peccant canvasmen stood sheepish as school-boys.

"What the hell ——" began the Boss slowly, when the hobo broke in with dry huskiness. "You've nothing on me, Boss; I was attacked. S'pose I've a right to defend myself and my job."

"You ain't got it yet, old un," snapped Liv. "You others," there was a tense pause, "three days' stoppage each!" There was a gasp and an indignant growl from the victims.

"Any gent want to argue?" demanded Raincy, balancing the little automatic on his palm and leering round the half-circle.

There was a dead silence. "Carried unanimous," sneered the Boss. "Three days, each man, remember, and next time it'll be a week's pay for all. You can fight your blasted guts out off the lot. But when there's canvas to raise, by cripes you'd better beat to quarters. Where's that galoot, Andy?"

"Comin' round, Liv," said the ex-miner. "He was sitting up and taking notice when I left."

As they all hurried towards the big top, Raincy glanced with a touch of respect at the indomitable old starved man.

"Can use your mitts, eh, old-timer?"

"No man takes a rise out of me," snarled the tramp.

For the next hour there was no talk save the shouting of orders as the delayed great top pieces were heaved aloft, teams of horses helping with the heavier cables; then, while the sidewalls were

being laced and hung, the seating squad poured into the interior, followed by their waggons, and an immense clattering and hammering broke out as the tiers were fitted together.

It was nearly half-past ten before Raincy's whistle blew and he pulled out a lean black cigar, which he lit from a petrol lighter. His men stretched weary arms, and already by groups were seeking quiet corners among the guy-ropes of the back tents, into which they curled and began snoring almost immediately.

The old stranger came slowly up to Raincy with a furrowed brow. "I've decided," he said abruptly, "I'm quitting after all."

"What's stung you, old-timer?" enquired Liv breezily. "I'll see they don't put it over you, if I take you on."

"Tain't that. This job don't suit, that's all."

"Think twice," answered the Canvas Boss coolly. "I'm short-handed this trip. Had to red-light two bums on the way to this stand." A bugle rang out musically in the sparkling summer air. "There," said Raincy, "that's first call for parade. Soon's they're back from their ramble there's dinner in the cook tent. Stay and tell us what you think of the menoo." The old man hesitated. Raincy drove a hand into his trouser pocket. "Here's a dollar advance, if that'll sweeten the option for you."

The tramp's hand greedily snatched the coin. Then he stood turning it over in his fingers. "Could you," he said at length, "stake me into big top to see the afternoon show?"

"Nix on that," Liv shook his black, matted head. "The old man can't abear us roughnecks consorting with his perfumed patrons."

"Then take your money," said the tramp briefly, proffering the dollar back, "and I'll quit your lot right away."

"Hey! Hey!" cried Raincy, checking him with a long arm. "You sure are a rube, after all, and I guessed you to be an old-timer. Must see the pretty spangles, eh? Well, you hoary-headed mother's mite, I'll see if I can give the office to the ticket waggon clerk to pass you; only, for Gawd's sake, hide your face as far back as you can, or you'll frighten the horses. That all right, now? Good. Say, if you're so thirsty for the grand spectacle, you'd best hang around here awhile. Here's where they give the 'mount' for the parade and you'll see them all, the creatures of loveliness and talent."

"Not me," said the tramp quickly, "I'll have a bit of a snooze 'fore dinner." He retired to the shade of a flap of canvas and flung himself down with his face buried in his arms.

Twenty minutes later Jorum's Grand Parade moved off the ground with a clash of music and began to take the road towards the town. The suburban gardens and paths were already thickly lined with spectators, as the Silver Cavalry Band in Polish Lancer uniform that led the procession paced slowly past on dapple-grey mounts. It was followed by a stream of Cavaliers and Ladies, all riding (said the programmes that had been thrust into every letterbox in the neighbourhood) picked horses from Mr. Jorum's unparalleled stud, and behind the Cavaliers came cowboys and impassive Red Indians.

Slowly, through gathering excitement, the parade wound down into the town. Here the sidewalks were packed, the houses beflagged, flowery arches erected across main thoroughfares and the whole countryside had flocked in since dawn for a day's shopping and amusement. Mounted police in leggings with covered leather stirrups galloped up and down, swinging their clubs to keep the route clear, with no particular regard for the safety of the swarms on the pavements. The Indian braves and squaws jogged by on their ponies, and in a roar of music followed the Temple of Polyhymnia with its great steam calliope at full blast, drawn—the crowd twittered and swayed—by trained dromedaries. (The rubes did not know of the motor concealed in its vitals.) Pretty country girls in bright dresses and sunbonnets stretched out sunburnt arms to pat the supercilious-looking beasts, who passed by recoiling and hissing. In a moment the Temple was eclipsed by the immense Car of Juno, blazing with gold and adorned with automatic peacocks unfolding and furling their glittering tails. Twenty elephants drew it, and their drivers as they passed along bellowed to the farmers in their gigs and carts: "Hold your horses; the elephants! the elephants!" Children screamed and clapped their hands in delight, and there was a surge across the road that cut the procession just in front of two gaily striped cars, one displaying automatic tumblers, the other automatic musicians costumed as Turks, nodding and jerking to weird music.

Back galloped the mounted police, shouting angrily, and the

interrupters scuttled back to place. The procession jerked on again, under the blazing sunshine, past white houses and old, weathered barns, past the cheerful greenery of orchards and the rainbow flare of its own posters on every blank wall, through the chattering, laughing throng of countryfolk, the bobbing of wide-brimmed Western hats and old stovepipes and the blaze of the women's flowered holiday headgear of straw. There was a silence of stupefaction as the Classical Chariot of Bacchus rumbled into view, drawn by white horses, with two live tigers fastened down by gilt chains at the feet of the vine-wreathed god and his gauzy female attendants on the platform. "Repeal the 18th Amendment!" roared a wag as the chariot passed, which would have annoyed Mr. Jorum, who only celebrated the wine god at the safe distance of mythological antiquity. Behind Bacchus and his tigers whirled the "Revolving Shrine of Hippodamus", a glorified roundabout with pretty girls and boys mounted on its fire-breathing steeds. A block at a street corner ahead brought the shrine to a momentary standstill just as the mechanism that moved the horses slowed to a rest. "Say, Pansy, are you giddy?" shouted a boy in Greek tunic, kicking his bare legs against his wooden mount, to a small, dark girl in a fairy dress with gauze wings, perched side-seat on the horse in front. She turned a grave little head with long black plaits and shook it at him. "Jorum's Show!" suddenly roared two announcers through loud speakers. "Come and see it, folks! Jorum's Show, the World's Wonder!"

The parade swung forward again and a towering platform heaved into view, showing stiff waxwork kings and statesmen on a lofty dais, purple-carpeted with gilt stars. Eighteen Hanoverian cream-coloured ponies drew it, and were led themselves by postilions in scarlet and powdered wigs.

There was a hush behind these rigid celebrities, for Jorum's Symphony String Orchestra of Eighty Performers on a huge banked-up car was making music that none could refrain from giving ear to; but in its rear sped ripples of laughter, as the World's Congress of Funmakers and Clowns jogged past on ponies, donkeys, comic motor-cars and property hobby-horses. At the end of the long line a penny-whistle band discreetly caricatured the Symphony Orchestra.

The parade seemed endless to the delighted crowds. In front it stretched on, rippling and gleaming, now the white head of a clown, now the sweep of a blue robe, now the grey trunk of an elephant, showing above the clustering heads; behind, trapeze artists twisted on a moving platform and groups of living statuary with white tights and faces revolved slowly on crimson velvet pedestals.

"See Jorum's Riders!" shouted a fresh announcer, as the equestrian stars, some in classical vests and some in jockey caps and breeches, jogged past on broad-backed horses. It was ever a battle between Jorum and his artists whether they should appear on parade; but he was adamant on the old-fashioned point. "Not a King in Urope," he would say, "who don't go on parade for his bread and butter, and if you want better authority see Joshua and the Grand Parade that brought down the house at Jericho. Only wish I could make walls fall down and the people rush for shelter to my big top at fifty cents the time." If there was further argument, he blandly explained that only the freaks stayed on the lot.

The Equestrian Director passed in glossy top hat and frilled shirt front in the authentic coronation coach of the last king of Saxe-Rothburg; and incongruously behind its gilded wheels marched Roman legionaries, gladiators in great closed helmets or carrying net and trident, then three-horsed chariots with laurel-wreathed drivers. These prepared the way for the mammoth filigree car bearing the Imperial Court of Nero, its team of long-maned horses aided by two giraffes attached to the corners with gold chains. "Don't tell me! Them beasts was never born!" cried a grey-haired farmer with emphasis as they stalked by. A blare of brass sounded behind the Roman pageant and Jorum's Private Negro Band, clad in silver with plumed headdresses and mounted on black horses, rode by. It heralded a figure that the programmes and an announcer tramping along by the edge of the crowd, hailed as "The World's Arena Queen—the Defier of Death, Madam Georgina Dufay."

The gaping crowd saw a tall woman with a proud head and stern mouth, dressed in a Hussar cap and tunic and a long grey skirt, sitting easily on a great black charger, with two grooms in royal scarlet liveries attending her. She passed, towering high

above them on her sidesaddle, her eyes distant, her thoughts clearly far from their presence. They gaped at her in awe and wonder and envy, "the Arena Queen — the Defier of Death," and did not dare even to cheer.

And then suddenly a glad shout went up. In a little old-fashioned Victoria drawn by Shetland ponies sat the giver of the feast with his wife in lavender silk and jet bonnet at his side, Leonidas Jeremy Jorum in white waistcoat and Panama, beaming and bowing as he handled his reins like an old country gentleman. Behind him America's National Band of the Stars and Stripes blared out of a car draped in the national colours, and above his head tottered an immense plaster reconstruction of the Goddess of Liberty in New York Harbour, painfully towed by thirty horses; but nobody looked. They were shouting, cheering, laughing, running forward to catch the hand of the old gentleman in the black coat and the beaming gold spectacles, the fairy godfather of young and full-grown children.

2

As the parade beat its way back through other streets to the lot it seemed to leave a vacuum behind its path into which the excited populace were sucked, even against their wills. Labourers sneaked from their jobs; children dodged school; down-and-outs without a cent in their pockets to pay for entry, joined in the throng that marched through the suburbs, assailed by vendors of balloons, candy, pink lemonade and flimsy, unauthorized programmes, to spread itself over the circus ground, collecting round the fronts of the sideshows, jostling along the passageways of the menagerie in the ammoniac odour of wild beasts and straw, staring at the freaks ranged on a red platform round the walls, wandering in gaping awe among the pictures and plaster statuary, the wax tableaux and glass cases of historical relics.

At half-past one the announcers, who had hitherto diverted the crowd to the subsidiary shows with the cry, "Plenty of time before the Big Show begins," began to change their song and exhort the people, both in front of the painted façade and in the exhibition tents, to "Walk up now, and secure your seats in time for the



Big Show!" The ticket waggon with three pigeonholes was placed before the entrance, and in the middle opening sat a fat smiling man with shallow china-blue eyes and a small waxed moustache, wearing a silk shirt with an elegant gold-pinned tie, and a light Panama. He counted the change with lightning speed, shuffling notes together in deft, plump fingers, and crying, "Next, please! Mofe along from the window, gentlemen! Make a way please." A young farmer slapped down a twenty-dollar note; "Fife, ten, fifteen, three and two bits!" cried the ticket-seller, thumbing the ends of a roll of notes, "Mofe on, please, quickly!" A few paces from the window the farmer, who had been counting over his change, stopped short. "Damn!" he exclaimed to his friend, "five dollars out! That crook's short-changed me." He turned and tried to press back against the moving queue to the ticket window. "Keep moving, sir!" promptly interposed a large employee. "You mustn't block the way! Short change? No, sir; mistakes can't be set right after you leave the window. Should have counted it on the spot." "Hurry! Folk! Hurry!" boomed an announcer from the top of the stairs at the entrance. "The show is just going to begin!" There was a rush of frantic ticket-holders, which swept the aggrieved man and his friend apart and bore them forward towards the entry. "I'm not done," panted the farmer, as he came together with his friend again inside. "Guess I'll see Jorum himself 'bout this swindle 'fore I leave the lot to-night!" They passed on into the immense cathedral of canvas, dim and cool after the blazing sunlight, with its tangle of ropes and trapezes hanging overhead, its sizzling arc lights, its three red-velvet-topped rings and two large performing-platforms in the middle of the curving hippodrome track.

Out by the ticket waggon, the throng slackened, then died to a trickle, as the cry came from the doors, "The Big Show has started! Hurry for the last few seats available!" One of the other two sellers leaned back on his stool and spoke to the fat man with a grin. "Say, Otto! You'd better mark time a bit on the short-change graft! Old man'll fire you into chink soon as hear of it." The German for a moment turned a smile of fat impudence upon him; then affected to be checking his accounts with the aid of the ticket-punching machine. Slowly, as he shuffled notes into heaps

according to values and stuffed them into drawers, he laid a small pile aside on a ledge below the window. His associate watched. "You've nigh on five hundred there!" he exclaimed at length with a whistle. "Say, it's a durned shame to rob the show like that!" He got truculently off his stool. "I haf not robbed the show!" protested Otto Riegelmann hotly. "I can answer for efery ticket taken. These fellows should count their change before they leaf the window. No one can help a mistake sometimes." "Some people don't strain 'emselfes to help it," remarked the ticket seller. Otto smiled again. "Come, Ben, don't you be bad-tempered. I think I am owing you a hundert for cards last night." He flipped a note over, which the man stuffed quickly into his trouser pocket. "If you play fair, Otto," he growled, mollified, "the rubes can look after their own wallets for me."

Otto slid off his stool. "I am just going round to the yard a few minutes," he said.

"Carlotta ain't there and Mrs. Riegelmann is," replied the ticket seller. "They've shifted all the acts about and about again." He leered at the German. "One would think Umberto arranged 'em specially so's you shouldn't have canoodling breaks with his sister."

"Oh, you are talking fine nonsense, Ben," retorted Otto, but with a fatuous air of pride. He lit a gold-tipped cigarette; pulled up his creased white flannel trousers; and sauntered towards the yard at the back of the big top, where the dressing tents and ring-horse stables were fitted up by the performers' wide entrance with its heavy red and gold-tasselled curtains.

In the yard the crashing of the band in the big top could be heard plainly, with the rolling of the applause and the murmurs and waves of laughter. From time to time, a glimpse of the dark interior, with its clusters of lights and rows of watching faces, was obtainable as the entrance curtains parted and a led horse or a string of clowns came out. Umberto Saffelli, the Equestrian Director, stagily dressed according to American usage in top hat, white breeches and patent-leather jackboots, with a long whip in his hand, came continuously in and out with a worried look on his lean bronze face. The slightest hitch or delay turned him into a raving, gesticulating maniac, and after fifteen years' experience

as ring director he behaved at each show as if he did not believe it possible to pull it through at all.

The yard itself alternately filled and emptied, now loud and clamorous, now fallen to a silence broken only by the humming of the band with its wheezing saxophones through the great curtains. At one moment it would be filled with the trampling of a squadron of horses plumed and bedizened for a liberty act; then it would be deserted but for a couple of acrobats waiting with coats thrown over their shoulders to protect their spangles from the dust. A troop of dancing girls would assemble, twittering and fluttering, swoop away into the interior, reappear and scatter to their dressing tents; a clown would toddle past with grave face, swinging a dummy figure; then a groom with water buckets would tramp over to the horse tent and presently some workmen in shirt sleeves begin to push out a decorated chariot for a spectacle number. There was generally, except during the large acts, chatter and jeering from the clowns' dressing tent at the back, or singing and laughing from the ballet girls' compartment.

A clatter of applause sounded, and Georgina Dufay ran out, followed by a groom leading a silky black horse with a white saddle, Umberto following and imploring her to make speed. The little hostler who had grumbled in the cook tent was waiting with a tall bay, glossy and delicately stepping, but bearing in his large gentle eyes an indefinable look of age; she quickly mounted and rode back into the gloom.

"Still clings to that old hack, eh?" remarked the clown with the dummy to the hostler, pointing after Georgy with his thumb.

"Yep!" said Bunt, patting the arched neck of the black horse, who shook his head impatiently. "She won't do an act without she works him in somehow, if it's only a couple of minutes. Can't say I blame her for that; one gets wunnerfully fond of these creatures when you've had 'em for years."

The clown shook his head, regarding the staring female face of his dummy. "That bay ain't fit for more than to ride parade — in Jorum's," he said.

"The rubes can't tell," said the groom. "This here now, he's a pretty bit of flesh though. Who-o-oal!" Ruy Blas had given an im-

perious tug at his reins and rapped a small hoof on the ground. "He wants what he wants when he wants it," remarked the groom. "That means he needs his feed. Some aristocrat! Looks at you as if you was dirt sometimes." He led Ruy Blas away to the stable tent at the back of the yard, and came hurrying back as Georgy emerged once more, her silk hat in her hand, with Knight led behind by a ring groom. She turned and took his bridle, waving the hostler back. "I'll see to him," she said; "is his feed ready? He must have the mash warmer; that's what you like, old man, isn't it?" She stroked his muzzle with her gloved hand as she walked with him to the horse tent. In a few minutes she came out and crossed to her own dressing tent, where she passed behind a canvas partition and began to pull off her coat, preparatory to changing into the close tunic and white tights she wore for her later, special act, with Patrico.

In the middle of her changing she heard a rustle in the front part of the tent, which was used as a sort of sitting room, a noise like a little mouse creeping about, and called, "Is that you, Pansy?"

"Yes, mummy," said a clear little voice.

"Have you got your book?"

"Yes, mummy," the voice sounded less distinct.

"Work at it, that's a good girl. I'll hear you say your piece when I come out, after tea. Have you put the teacups ready?"

There was a little stirring behind the curtain and a clink of china. Georgy knotted the ribbons of her sandals tightly and tucked the edges in with the end of a nail file. Then she pushed the curtain aside.

"Pansy! Now what did I tell you?"

The small, black-haired creature, sitting on a folding stool in a pink check wash frock and bent double over a shiny French exercise book, was sucking at a long twisted red-and-blue candy stick. Her large dark eyes now fixed themselves watchfully on her mother, as, removing the sweet an inch from her lips, she mumbled, "Daddy gave it to me."

"Yes, but I thought I told you never to touch that nasty stuff they sell on the grounds. You don't know *what* it's made of."

"Daddy said I might—for once." Pansy's voice went up a little; her pencilled eyebrows drew together.

"Your Daddy means to be kind, but in a thing of this sort little girls do what their mother tells them. Bring it here."

The child, clutching the candy stick with one hand to her breast, seized the stool with the other and curled her feet round its legs as if defying any one to pull her off.

"Pansy, did you hear what I said?"

She knew that icy tone in her mother's voice and shot a quick glance of alarm at her. Then, slowly unwinding her legs, she came towards Georgy and held out the sweet with a languid arm.

"Don't do it again!" Georgy dropped the candy stick into her waste basket.

Pansy stood still for a moment; then the corners of her small curved mouth went down, she stamped a foot furiously and broke into loud sobs. "It's not fair!" she shrilled, "*he* said I might, for once. All I do, always, you say it's wrong. You're never kind to me; I love Daddy; you're horrid, horrid, cruel!" She gulped and cried more loudly, tears running out between her fingers, her thin shoulders shaking.

Her tear-blurred eyes could not see the stab of suffering that marked itself on her mother's face. But she felt herself lifted up onto her mother's knee and her head gently pressed against the soft silk of her tunic. A hand stroked her hair for a moment in silence.

Then, "It's not a very brave little girl, is it?" said Georgy, in a queerly shaken voice, "to make all this fuss over a silly piece of candy."

The child, swiftly exhausted by her nerve storm, sobbed and panted quietly.

Georgy nursed her, bewildered, as she had often been before, by the nervous sensitiveness of her daughter. She herself had always, when rebellious, fought her parents with a silent, wary hostility — but then she had never been afraid of anything, and Pansy seemed afraid of almost everything, and she could not understand that either. Suddenly she felt a soft kiss on her chin; Pansy had strained up to her and worked an arm round her neck. She hugged her tighter for a moment; then spoke in a more cheerful voice. "Come," she said, "we'll forget about all this. Do you want me to drink the rain-drops?" She put her lips softly to the tears that still

hung on Pansy's flushed cheeks. "Does it tickle?" Pansy's shoulders twitched and a smile quivered on her woebegone mouth. "And the Bear said," pursued Georgy, in a growling voice, "as I've had no breakfast" — Pansy knew this game well and wriggled to get out of her mother's firm hold — "here's a nice little girl, with a nice little — *nose*." She made a dart with a laughing gleam of white teeth, and Pansy, gurgling, tipped off the end of her knees, to be caught just above the ground in her hands.

"*Allez* — up!" cried Georgy, hoisting her back astride one long white-clad leg. "This is the way the ladies ride! No, don't hold on!" Pansy, as she jerked her knee up and down, clutched at her outstretched hands for support. "O-oof! There we go then!" She stopped "galloping" with Pansy's hands smothered in her own. "How did you get on at the real riding lesson, this morning?" she asked. Pansy looked evasive. "Is Mr. Umberto unkind?" said Georgy gently. "Are you frightened, lovey?"

Pansy looked furtively round the tent, then said in a whisper, "Frightened when I come off."

"But you're held up on the mechanic, dear; you can't fall!"

"Don't like swinging in the air." She shut her eyes tight with a grimace.

Georgy sighed. "I must hold the rope myself to-morrow," she said. "You won't be afraid with Mummy, will you, darling? I don't want my little girl to be frightened of anything in all the world. But is the dancing going on all right, anyhow?"

A cunning little smile of self-satisfaction flashed out. "M'm," said Pansy, nodding and shaking her black curls. "Madame Saffelli says I'm the only one that listens. We're doing bat'ments."

"What are bat'ments?" enquired Georgy, letting her down and standing up to smooth her tunic. "You'll soon know more about everything than your poor old mother, won't you?"

She stood gazing with a tender smile as Pansy, with her back towards her and no perceptible sense of having an audience, beat her slim brown leg in its short white sock up and down. Then she looked thoughtful, remembering a photograph of an aunt she had never seen, her mother's sister Rosina, who had been a prima ballerina at the Scala in Milan. Pansy had turned round and was humming in a little clear voice as she swung round on the toes



of one foot. Georgy saw vividly the faded photograph of the middle-aged woman in billowing gauze skirts with her great dark eyes and wistful smile. "Pansy'll be a dancer too," she thought with a little pang. It seemed to her sad that her child would probably never know the companionship of horses.

"Are you ready, marm?" enquired a cautious voice outside the tent. "I've brought Patrico out. The Santanis are just coming off the net."

"Learn your piece, Pansy, while I'm on," said Georgy, carefully taking down some elaborately looped ropes from a hook on the centrepole, "then we'll have tea; I bought some chocolate biscuits for you."

She hurried through the yard that was now thronged with bored-looking Romans of the Court of Nero, while chariot horses were trampling back against the poles in the background. "*Presto! Presto!*" snapped Mr. Umberto as she passed through the curtains into the great tent, where the booming voice of an announcer could be heard: — "*releasing herself from all bonds in one minute, twenty seconds, while the horse is at full gallop, without outside assistance from any quarter.*"

At the back of the yard a cautious step fell and a fat man in a pale-blue silk shirt stole between two waggons and crept towards a group of Roman dancing girls who were toying with flower-wreathed wands.

"Carlotta! Carlotta!" he whispered, and a black-haired girl with striking eyes and a hard mouth turned a lascivious smile on him.

— "*a bank and water-jump of twenty feet, while suspended by one foot from the horse's back,*" roared the voice inside the tent.

"I haf squared Micky Lurgan," Otto went on; "he will haf the bottles, gold-leaf '94, on the private dining car; you can easy slip through from your sleeper: we can haf little game too, if you wish, no one will disturb us."

— "*only the most perfect timing on the part of horse and rider makes it possible to perform this feat without disaster. Ladies and Gentlemen, the Arena Queen, Madam Georgina Dufay.*" A heavy chord burst and thrilled from the band, and a tense silence followed inside the tent.

High up at the back of the twenty-cent, cheapest seats, a ragged

old man with a fierce grey beard sat looking down intently on the sweep of the huge arena below. Nearly on a level with his seat the crystal chandeliers sparkled; from boxes above the top tier, limelight men sent their grey shafts down onto the oblong of dusky grass surrounded with red boarding, from which straining attendants had already carried away the velvet-topped fences of the three rings, and the two stages. Instead there had been raised in the centre of the track a high jumping bank with a wide waterproof tank beyond, which grooms were filling from a hosepipe. Others ran with white-painted, spruce-topped hurdles which they set at regular intervals all along the track. The director's whistle shrilled and the assistants scuttled away. He blew again; the band struck a chord; and the limes swept round to focus on a spot near the middle where a groom held a great black and white horse by a headstall, a few paces from which stood a tall figure all in white, like a living statue except for a flash of gold on her hair. A smaller spot was focussed on a black cloth spread upon the ground, upon which were laid out a set of curiously looped white ropes.

As the band hummed softly into a waltz, Mr. Umberto walked forward and gave Georgy a leg up onto Patrico's back, bare save for a single girth. He seated her, however, with her face to the horse's tail; she lay down along his spine, the back of her head just touching his neck. Two grooms stepped forward and picked up the ropes; then they began to swathe them round her. One passed from her hanging right ankle under Patrico's belly to tie her left foot on the other side. Two bound her by her waist in the same fashion. She sat up a moment to let her wrists be tied behind her back, and a sort of strait-waistcoat of cord was webbed round her body, pinning her arms to her side. As she lay back again in the hard grey light of the arcs, she seemed helpless as a mummy, held upon the horse only by the ropes that passed under his barrel. Then a bandage was tied over her mouth and attached with cords round Patrico's neck.

Mr. Umberto's whistle piped; the band stopped. In the silence the spectators of the cheap seats strained forwards excitedly; only the old man cocked his head to one side calmly, though his eyes were intent.

"Are — you — ready?" Mr. Umberto's voice floated over the

wide gulf of canvas. The groom at Patrico's head nodded. "Go!" The band thundered into a wild *galope*; the groom leapt back from the horse's head, with the headstall in his hand; and Patrico, unbitted, his black mane flying frenziedly, charged for the end of the oblong track as if he would dash himself and his stiff burden to pieces against the barrier. Some of the children in the front row scrambled out of their seats as he swept towards them; but he swung inwards at the corner and followed the curve of the track, fleetly but smoothly.

There was a sudden murmur round the audience; the captive had, it seemed, bitten through the gag and was raising her head and shoulders, slowly and painfully, on her bound wrists. Thud, thud, thud, went the racing hoofs until a smash of applause drowned them. Georgy had worked with her shoulders until the rope round her chest had slid down to her waist; she was seated now, facing Patrico's tail, gripping easily with her knees. She began to kick a foot; it sprang loose; the rope flew out from under the horse's belly and, flipped off her other ankle, fell with a hard smack against the boarding of the arena. With her free legs she gripped the haunches, tugging; the waist rope parted at a spring catch and fell on the grass; a groom dived and picked it up as soon as she had passed, pelting for the second time up the long left side of the track.

Balancing delicately with movements of her body, her arms still pinned, she swung both legs onto one haunch, then one across in front, and was astride facing Patrico's head with only her arms now to free. The audience gasped and a frightened voice screamed; she seemed to topple off his back and slide down his flank; but she had twisted a foot into a loop on the girthband and hung head downwards a few inches only, it looked, from the pounding hoofs. And as she hung there, while the spectators murmured and swayed, the whole net of rope that pinned her arms shook down slowly over her head and fell away; she raised herself by the leverage of the looped leg and the muscles of her torso, and was riding bareback on the unbridled horse, her wrists still bound behind her back. In the rows every one chattered and explained to his neighbour how to do it.

But the gabble was cut short; guided by pressure from her

knees, Patrico had turned outwards and was leaping the hurdles, his rider without reins or saddle swaying supplely to his springs. He passed round the jumps to a tempest of clapping, and then, turning inwards again, rushed for the great bank-jump in the middle.

There was a fresh quiver of alarm round the tent. Georgy, just as he approached the bank, had flung herself over again and was tossing head downwards, all her body relaxed, against his powerful flank. He thudded onto the bank; changed feet and flew over the water; and as he panted to a standstill in obedience to a signal from Mr. Umberto, who stepped out to check him, Georgy was seated astride again, waving in one hand the loosened cord that had held her wrists.

An immense cheer broke out, which was momentarily checked by the announcer, who roared through his megaphone with a stop-watch in his hand, "One minute 19.4 seconds." Then the enthusiasm broke loose again, swelling up to a hollow thumping of feet on the wooden boards, which accompanied the fusillade of clapping and the frantic shouts. Six or seven times Georgy, breathing hard and perspiring, had to run back through the huge crimson curtains; until Mr. Umberto who, never receiving applause himself, impartially grudged it to all the artists who did, cut into the reception with angry blasts of his whistle and ordered on the Roman spectacle and races that closed the programme.

The faint clamour of the mass beneath the big top still pursued Georgy as, wrapping a dressing gown round her, she ran across the deserted yard into her tent for a sponge-down. Pansy was lying on the ground inside, with her French primer religiously spread out before her, but more intent on trying to make a paper mouse jump. "Come along, darling!" exhorted her mother, "haven't you even got the kettle on the stove yet? Mummy's dying for her cup of tea!"

Outside, in the swirl of people descending from their seats at the end of the spectacle, there moved an old man with a stiff, bent leg, his eyes distant, a curious smile on his blackened lips, oblivious to the hustling and joking around him. The crowd thinned along the various alleys; he wandered on, as if not marking where he went, round by the back of the waggons and the sideshow tents, his fumbling hands filling a disreputable briar-

wood pipe with fragments of tobacco dust scraped from his various pockets. Then he gazed round for a light. Behind a fortune-teller's tent sat a fat man with a waxed moustache shuffling and cutting cards for practice on the lid of a barrel. With deft fingers he spread out fans of cards on his arm and snapped them to again; he might have been practising conjuring, but there was a furtive look in his china-blue eyes as he tested his legerdemain that did not resemble the smiling publicity of the wizard.

"Got a light, Mister?" asked the hobo gruffly.

Otto Riegelmann carelessly tore a match from a strip with *Jorum's* across the flap.

The old tramp sucked at his half-filled pipe. "Card-playing, Mister?" he asked at length, with one eye cocked on the barrel.

"That depends," answered Otto, "upon whether anybody makes it worth my while to play."

The old tramp put a hand in his pocket; then checked himself and moved on a few paces. He paused and, as if unwillingly, wandered back. Fascinated, he watched Otto playing with the pack. Then he dived into his pocket again and produced a silver coin. "Stake you a dollar!" he said abruptly.

Otto made a little grimace at the smallness of the stake; and the tramp rattled a bit of broken chain in his trouser pocket. The German's look changed and he pointed to a wooden box the old man might sit on; then, bringing a bowl of chips from inside the tent, he threw one over to his adversary. "Cut!" he said.

There was a slap of falling cards and Otto with a little snort chucked another chip across. There was a reshuffle and again the sound of falling pasteboard and Otto gave an exclamation. "You haf the luck eh, *Kamerad*?" He counted out five chips. "Now will you dare stake them all?"

Two or three loafers and canvasmen had drawn near to watch the game; they were in time to see quite a little heap of chips piled up on the hobo's edge of the barrel. Otto gave him a hard look; then took off his hat and squared up to the board, beginning for the first time to attend to the game. The idle onlookers swelled till there was a ring hiding the gamblers.

Over in the yard, empty now in the blaze of the westering sun but for the grooms clinking pails and hissing as they attended to

the ringstock in the tent, Georgy, ready dressed to go over to the cook tent for supper, was resting in a canvas deckchair, a cigarette in her mouth. She had heard Pansy recite her French poem before tea, and had sent her back to the book to get it perfect before she let her touch a chocolate biscuit. Now she watched her dabbling with a paint-box on an uncoloured Jorum poster she had coaxed from the Boss of the bill-posting waggon.

Suddenly the voices of the grooms were hushed and there was a stir as of greater activity. A shuffling step clinked on a stony patch in the middle of the yard and a voice cried outside Georgy's tent, "Can I see you a few minutes, Mrs. Riegelmann?"

Georgy sprang up. "Come right in, Mr. Jorum. Pansy, love, go and see if little Saffelli and the others haven't a ball game on." Pansy snatched up her painting paraphernalia and whisked out of the tent.

Jorum took the armchair which Georgy offered him. He lifted off his wide Panama and wiped his forehead. "Hot, isn't it, my dear? We'll have a big storm in a day or two, I'm much afraid. Just like the cussedness of things to catch us when we shall be in the mountains. Wa-al, I thought I'd jest like to have a chat with you, Mrs. Riegelmann, about a little difficulty that has arisen." He played for a moment with the Masonic triangle and other emblems on the heavy watch chain festooned over his white waistcoat. "Well, it's like this. Our fixer had just had a lot of trouble with a party of folk, guess there wasn't less than twenty, all told, that got together and swore they had been shortchanged at the ticket-waggon. They nearly had the Mayor on us. Each one of 'em laid it onto Mr. Riegelmann, by their description of the man they said done it. Now, wait a minute!" Georgy had stiffened. "I don't want you and me to misunderstand one another. I'm not laying it to your husband that he'd try any graft of that sort deliberately."

"I should hope not, Mr. Jorum," said Georgy with a sort of mechanical anger. "You ought to know my husband better. He's incapable of anything of the sort."

The old man looked pityingly at her under his rough eyebrows.

"Quite, quite," he said soothingly. "You and I don't need to argify 'bout sich a plain point. No! I figger it this way, Mrs. Riegel-



mann. The weather's durned hot; I feel that storm in my joints; we've had crowds that lick creation this week — I'm sending some figgers to all the big papers that'll bear me out — it's human to make mistakes in reckoning when there's a rush like that; and, as you are going to remind me, the rubes oughta count their own money. Still! You can't get people to believe that a showman's honest. They've been stung once too much. They don't think it's your calculation but your conscience that's weak. So I've had to make a rule to be like Pilate's wife, ma'am, stripped to the knuckle before entering the cabinet. I've done clear away with grafting and gambling and kept the World's Wonder Show the complexion of angels' wings, ma'am. Some task, let me tell you!"

Georgy wondered internally by what subtle shade of reasoning the Salvation Text Competition, held in the Bible tent with twenty-five per cent. rake-off on all prizes for the benefit of selected missionary societies, a sacred lucky-dip which Jorum himself opened with a five-minute sermon at every town they visited, was clear from the stigma of gambling. She thought too that if Jorum really knew nothing of the games that were played behind the flap of innocent fortune-telling tents and houp-la tables, the circus detective must be singularly negligent. But she said nothing.

"So for the sake of Jorum's reputation," concluded the old man, hoisting his bulk out of the deck chair, "I'd be obleeged, ma'am, if you'd ask your husband to polish up his mathematics so's our patrons don't think, what I know can't be true, that he sometimes counts both ends of a five-dollar bill and calls it ten."

As Georgy knew that this was one of Otto's methods of operation, and knew that Jorum knew that she knew it, she could not help a stain of red coming onto her cheekbones. Jorum laid a fatherly paw on her shoulder.

"Don't you worry too much, anyways," he said. "You're doin' fine for us. You hit 'em, and hard too, again this afternoon with the Captive. It's a wunnerful trick. I figger it this way. First, there's the training the horse — used to be a devil once, by your account; now he's a lamb, — then there's the ridin'; and then there's the cute apparatus you devised with all them slip-loops and spring-catches, not one of which you ever tangle in. Well, you heard them shoutin' for you to do it all over again — considerate, as the

gillies always are — and that's a testimonial, seeing half of 'em must have watched you doing it last year here."

"Yes, it's getting old already, isn't it, Mr. Jorum?"

"Well, I'd hardly say that, quite yet. Still, novelty is the Vitamin A of the circus —"

"And they shall have it. When you visit me in winter quarters after Christmas I'll show you something brand-new."

"Think you can?" His brows went up doubtfully. "You gotta outdo yourself each time, remember!"

"I shall manage it."

"Guess you can't go very much nearer the act of Gawd, Mrs. Riegelmann, without enlarging your insurance premium."

"Wait and see, Mr. Jorum."

"Sure, that's my perfession. Good night, my dear. The Lawd prosper your work at second show; eat a good supper."

He minced away on his little feet through the sunset glare, his tall hunched figure flinging thin, sharp shadows on the trampled soil of the yard. On his way to the entrance of the lot, whence he meant to ride in his car down to see a town editor, he did not see, or would not stop to look into, a thick circle of men, with a few women among them, poring over some spectacle in their midst behind a sideshow. They were watching two men playing cards on a barrel, an old ragged tramp, sitting up fierce and observant with a huge pile of blue and red chips by his side, a fat German, pallid and perspiring, who seemed to lean against his side of the board ready to faint.

The old man rose. "Better stop," he said. "Luck's clear agin' you to-night, Mate." He turned to the onlookers. "Don't none of you say he didn't have his fair chance of a come-back. Didn't he get me twice back down to my original stake?"

"Sure!" "That's true!" replied several of the bystanders.

"I don't belief you efer had anything else to play with," snarled Riegelmann, "you stood to lose nothing; it's a damnt swindle."

"Nobody didn't compel you to play," said the old man. "My boy, I'd let this be a warning to you. You're one of them that can't stop so long's they see a bit of pasteboard face upwards. So was I — once. Never no more, thank God! Come, settle up! I reckon it at sixteen hundred dollars."

Otto fumbled in his pocket. "I'll pay you five hundred now, and the rest I must get after second show."

The onlookers pressed in on the players, murmuring. Few of them had not been stung by Otto Riegelmann at one time or another, fairly or crookedly, and they were determined he should take his medicine, now. "None of that, Otto!" came cries. "Pay the old tie-crawler; he's won it fair. Hang on to him till yuh get it, grandad!"

"Fork out, my boy!" said the old tramp menacingly. Otto looked wildly round the hostile faces; then pulled out a fat pocketbook from his hip and began with tears of rage to throw down bills on the board. A derisive cheer came from the crowd, as he searched his pockets for the last fifty dollars; then it began to stream away, excitedly playing the game over again.

The old tramp turned from the crowd and wandered to the very edge of the encampment on the far side from the road. He came to a ditch with the open country beyond it. Then he sat down on a stump and gazed out over the fertile valley with its sweeping ridges and patches of dark timber, the falling sun irradiating his worn and grimy face. "Sixteen hundred!" he said aloud at last. "It's a dream. I can do it now, without feeling ashamed."

He turned and stumped briskly back to the camp. But as he drew near to the great tents, a large brown hand fell suddenly on his shoulder.

"Well, old-timer." It was Liv Raincy, the Canvas Boss. "What about unpicking some of our embroidery? You've eaten supper, h'ain't you?"

The old man knocked the detaining hand aside. "Don't pester me," he said irascibly. "I'm quitting your squad, and *pronto*, if you want to know."

"Indeed?" Liv dodged in front of him. "But you took an advance, you know? Didn't he, Kerrigan?" The great Irishman was lounging near with two or three of the other roughnecks. They assented and drew closer.

"Oh, your money! Take it back if you've got change." The old man held out a twenty-dollar note.

"Gee! Some bloatocrat!" exclaimed Raincy. "Say, grandad, have you come into a fortune sudden?"

The old man was not swift enough to check an involuntary movement of his hand towards his waist belt.

Raincy and his assistants exchanged swift, meaningful glances.

"Listen here, old-timer." The Boss again laid his hand, almost tenderly, on the old tramp's shoulder. "I want to speak to you like a grandson. We're cruel short-handed this trip, as I told you. You'd be doin' us a favour, as between gentlemen, if you'd stand by this evening, till we've wrapped the rag up and stowed her down at the yards. I reckon that's fair?"

The old man glanced round the gang. They were standing very still, with eyes fixed on him as if waiting a signal. He judged it best to temporize. "Your train goes in advance of the rest, don't it?" he asked.

"Gospel! We're the flying squadron, you know."

"Well," the tramp shifted from foot to foot, "I'll see you through as far as the depot. It's fair, as you say, and I can't, honestly, afford to lose the day's pay."

"Sure, you can't, can you?" Raincy grinned with mingled humour and ferocity. "Well, gents, we'd best be strolling." Through the odorous, dewy air of the falling evening a bugle sounded a fairy call from the big top, where the searchlights were shooting up long streamers and the electric inscription, "Jorums," was winking from green to red and gold. "Hurry! Hurry!" roared the Canvas Boss at the sound. "He's given 'em 'Mount' in the yard; we'll miss our saloon sleepers."

Already the cook tent had disappeared; the sideshows were collapsing like cardhouses, and in the swiftly deepening dusk the men rushed to the ropes of the menagerie tent, while the lilt of music came from the crowded house beyond in the big top. They worked savagely and the old-timer had for half an hour no time to think of escape. But, after the cages had been got away and the top down, he began to look for a chance to slip aside in the night. It was in vain. Always Raincy or Kerrigan intervened with an order that kept him busy for many minutes. He began to see that he must go to the railroad as he had promised.

At length the waggons were loaded and the menagerie canvas squad jolted off the lot with them down towards the town, leav-

ing the lights and the blare of the still running show behind them. At the loading yard of the station, all was thunderous jolting and shouting as the train crews with their horse teams hoisted the immense waggons over the runs up on to the flat trucks. Red lanterns swung; jets of steam roared out from between the wheels of shunting engines; the quiet click of switches from a signal box set high above the confusion, like a monastery on a hill, was heard in momentary lulls; and the shadowy forms of huge engines with pointed cowcatchers surged ponderously past clanking deep-noted bells.

Now was the time, thought the old tramp, to slip away behind some coaches and scale the yard fence. But with the thought came an arm that linked on to his. "One more little job, old-timer!" said Raincy's shrill voice through a blast of escaping steam. "Just help lift them poles down there onto that car and you can go to your hotel."

The poles were lying in a bundle on the ground by the open door of a goods coach. Kerrigan lounged against the side of the car, holding up a lantern to show the doorway.

The hobo stooped and got his arms round the poles. "Slug!" said Raincy quietly, and Kerrigan, whirling the heavy iron lantern round, brought it down with a smash of splintering glass on the old man's head. He sank forward with a grunt.

"Load him aboard, boys!" sang Raincy, with savage exultation, as he skipped onto the coach behind the limp form his assistants were dragging inside. "All *sereno*, Mr. Switchman; let 'er buck!

You take the nod  
From the flying squad,  
And sling her through Hellmouth gate.  
We sleep in the freezers,  
And wake with the Greasers,  
So, switch for the circus freight!"

The roaring chorus, taken up by the canvasmen, died away as the advance train clicked out of the yard, whistled fiercely at the crossing, and jolted out of view round a curve with a last glimmer of red stars.

Up on the lot, the big-top squad was tearing down canvas

and ripping up quarter poles with savage energy under an immense tranquil moon; along the road to the railway clashed and bumped the endless waggon train, at the top speed of the horses, the drivers cracking whips and shouting like an army in rout after a defeat. A few motors with gleaming headlights, to take the principal performers to the sleeping cars, stood ranged in the middle of the field. Georgy came towards one, carrying a sleepy Pansy in her arms. "Did you see my husband?" she asked of a groom who was carting a load of empty buckets towards one of the few remaining waggons. "Gone ahead, Miss," he shouted over his shoulder. "He was carrying Miss Carlotta's trunk to the ballet car." Georgy got into her allotted motor without a word and the driver slipped the clutch in.

On the lot beneath the triumphantly sailing moon there now stood only the great masts of the big top. Slowly they toppled over to the chorus of the canvasmen and were carted along to their lorry. All over the open field, which again disclosed its outlines of wood and boundary path in strong shadow and silver light, little glowworms danced: the lanterns of the sanitation squad, spearing waste paper, sweeping up litter, and charging to deposit it in a dump where the town scavengers would evacuate it the next day. One by one their lanterns were extinguished; the few pairs of motor headlights remaining on the expanse turned away and sped with a sweep of ghostly rays over the grass. The whirring and rattling grew fainter down the road; sank to a murmur and were silent. The wide valley stretched itself peacefully beneath the moon; a few farmhouse lights twinkled across its still immensity; a window with a red blind shone through a clump of trees above the sunken track. In a copse on the further side of the silent field an owl hooted once and again, and waited for answer.



## CHAPTER TWO

### I

ALL through that night the heavy circus trains puffed and pushed their way on and up into the mountains. The engines strained at the freights on the steep gradients, and the sun glimmering between red sandstone peaks showed the advance cars still grinding slowly round steep curves overhung by pine and birch and gashed with torrent beds. The crew meanwhile slumbered, smoked and gambled, and Liv Raincy, standing at the open side doors of his car, chafed with a savage glitter in his eyes that foretold trouble when the canvas should at last be unrolled.

"That yaller-toothed, pison-breathed old coyote come about yet?" he enquired at length, spitting vindictively at the track and turning to peer into the gloomy interior of the car.

"Still snortin', Boss," rejoined a hand fingering a tallow-spotted deck of cards. A younger man with whom he was playing by the light from the doors turned a little pale. "Say, I hope Kerrigan didn't do for the old — . What if he passes in his checks?"

"You keep your cod's eyes in your own plate!" Raincy booted him with his iron-shod toe. He lurched across the swaying waggon to a corner of the inside where a red handkerchief showed on a heap of straw. Dimly in the gloom the form of the old man could be discerned, lying on his back and breathing hoarsely. Raincy pulled down a corner of the improvised bandage. "He'll be hunting trouble again soon enough," he reported. "Not that I'd exchange heads with him when he pulls round." His white teeth gleamed with cruel glee in the shadows. "Now listen, all of you mangy prairie-dawgs," his voice rose above the clank of the wheels, "you've all had your share, and when the Old Man asks, 'Mr.

Livingstone, how did this deepressing deebacle eeventuate?' there ain't one of you that knows a single thing of how it happened. I picked the pore old gentleman up from between the wheels at the risk of my elbow joints just as we was moving off, and don't you forget it! Seems he fell between the cars, through takin' an overdose of cough-mixture. Any tough that thinks he knows more can meet me afterwards behind the cook tent, where I'll debate with him. Say, this don't happen to be the long-lost cheeild or eerin' sister of any of you mud-turtles that the old roost-robber carried about with him?" Raincy tossed over a creased and faded tintype mounted on a card, showing a small, smiling girl in a seaside goat carriage. The canvasmen herded together to look at it and there was silence for a moment. "Unidentified?" queried Liv. "Well, there goes." He snatched it from the stumpy, begrimed fingers that were holding it and tossed it away on to the track.

"That's a burning shame," said a discreet voice in the darkness at the back. "The pore old swine mebbe cared for it more than all his dollars."

"Mebbe not more than you cared for his dollars," retorted the Boss with ferocious joviality. He turned again to the doorway. "Hell's pepper!" he snarled. "Ain't we never goin' to strike this burg before p'rade call?"

But it was not before ten that the canvas cars slid down a long incline into a funnel-shaped valley at the further end of which an extensive oil field had given birth to a sprawling town of wooden sheds and shanties. Fantastic crags of black slate and sandstone towered high on each side of the narrow upland valley, closing at the west end to a slit in the bleak rock wall, but widening out at the eastern orifice, where, in an amphitheatre of streaked cliffs, rose the spidery metal derricks of the petroleum wells, a lifeless forest of tapering, perforated trunks.

Near the narrow end of the funnel the circus lot had been chosen on a sandy patch of waste, dotted with coarse tussocks. The canvas crew, without a word and without their breakfast, fell to, sweating and straining, while the performers' train, bumping in on the very heels of their cars and the menagerie's, added a fresh turmoil to the yapping and bellowing from the cages and

the whistles and cries of the Canvas Bosses. A fierce yellow sun beat down from the patches of dazzling blue that showed between the serrated crests of the encircling mountains; and the dust rose in clouds upon the ill-watered tract where the tents were going up, producing thirst, ill temper and headache among the over-taxed circus folk. It seemed impossible that the confusion should be righted in time for the afternoon performance; but Jorum himself, his face the colour of beetroot, his Panama on the back of his bald dome, his little patent shoes white with dust, was everywhere, advising, urging, encouraging, never for a moment losing his presence of mind or his temper, and the impossible was done. Punctually at midday the bugle rang from crag to crag; the brass bands filled the valley royally with their echoes; and the Grand Parade streamed along the illmade road between the spruce telegraph poles towards the oblong of low wooden roofs at the end of the valley. At the same moment the hooters from the wells sounded the half-day holiday that Jorum had persuaded the owners to give; and the workers, on foot, on their motorbicycles or in their Ford cars, raced into the streets already filled with the women, to meet the procession.

The last stakes of the big top were hammered home as the music of the return was heard, and the exhausted canvas crew hobbled wearily to the cook tent for their delayed meal. Boss Raincy paused a moment to cast a curious eye at an old man with a red handkerchief, blood-streaked, across his forehead who had worked in sullen silence all the morning, his pale grimy features hard-set, and was now following his mates, still without a word, to where the flag hung outside the cook tent. Raincy was puzzled by this silence. He had been ready for any kind of recrimination, outbreak of violence or scene of entreaty from the plundered stranger; he had been prepared to confront his accuser before Jorum if the old man carried his tale to headquarters. But this apparent ignoring of the assault, the wound, the robbery baffled him, and made him a little uneasy.

"Gee! What's the old sneak thief rigging?" he muttered. "Have we slugged the mem'ry clean outen his lousy carcass, maybe?" His thoughts were diverted by a voice.

"Well, Mr. Livingstone," Jorum never abbreviated the pious

name that had originally earned Raincy his job, "Well, Mr. Livingstone, I guess we're fit to open on the tick, after all."

"Sure, Chief!" Raincy pulled out one of his long black cigars. "Some tarnation hustle, I guess."

"Don't swear, Livingstone," said Jorum mildly. "What would your old mother think if she heard you?"

"Why, Chief, I guess if you'd heard Mom when she had her pipe ablaster and a quarter of raw rot-gut inside to encourage her —"

"Yes, yes, Raincy, I wasn't meaning to speak to you about that just now —" He took off his Panama and wiped his high forehead between the shaggy grey tufts with his purple silk handkerchief. "Don't you reckon it's gettin' cooler?"

"Mebbe so, if you say it, Chief. We all been as het as — heliotrope, doin' our pile-drivin'."

"You may take the cinch from me, it's so. And why, Mr. Livingstone, do you reckon the temperature's changing?"

"Sure, I'm no weather-chart sharp, as you must know, Chief. I leave that to the noospapers."

"Well, screw your right optic around your shoulder, Mr. Livingstone — it would do you no harm if you kep it polished a bit more — and give me a report of what you see yonder up the gully."

Raincy spun round, impressed by the Chief's solemn tone, and cast a glance through the narrow opening at the throat of the valley. Then he ripped out a shrill whistle of dismay. The two stood silent, gazing into the distant cleft, while from the high wall of canvas by which they stood came the cries of the announcers: "Take your seats PLEASE for the World's Wonder Show."

Between the cliffs that shut in the valley with leaning precipices the sheet of blue sky that had shimmered since daybreak had changed to steel-grey, and in the middle of it a deep purple cloud like the head of a parasol smoked up from a swirling stem.

"A cyclone, by Gawdl!" said Raincy, with clenched teeth, "and ain't she got a stride on her tool!"

"Well, Mr. Livingstone, what's the order? There's no time for

congressmen's manœuvres. Do we take her down and give these folk their nickels back?"

"Shucks, Chief! The old bedquilt'll stand a puff of cold air. My men use stakes, not toothpicks!"

"Hurry, folk! Hurry, folk!" boomed the announcers, "the Grand Entry is immediately beginning." There was a steady chink of coin from the pay-openings, a murmur of talk and laughing. The air had turned chillier and the strip of sky roofing the valley was now dulled and lifeless. "All fifty-cent seats sold!" cried a voice. "One and two dollars only!"

Raincy made an impatient noise. "You ain't, sure, going to hand back all that dough, Chief, for fear of a bit of a squall? Lemme get my toughs to hook her down onto the waggons."

Jorum hesitated. "If she rips, Mr. Livingstone, it's, mebbe, a ten thousand dollar bill, and I guess the Canvas Boss is mor'lly and legally responsible."

"If she rips, Chief, I reckon there's Insurance Corporations in Noo York will weep salt — and there's only one reesponsible proprietor of all that transpires in Jorum's Show — see Small Bills."

"If she crashes, Raincy, there'll be fatalities."

"Which you'll know damn well how to keep outen the noos, Chief."

Jorum, with a perplexed expression, looked up the valley again. The rocks had vanished behind a thick purple veil; there was a still low but menacing whistle running through his canvas city; the pennons stood stiff as board; spirals of dust leapt up and licked his plaid trousers, then danced mockingly away. There were some cries among the part of the crowd that had failed to gain admission and the clap of a few feet running. Waltz music came serenely from the big top.

Jorum, still undecided, peered about him; but the air was dim already with flying dust. Then abruptly Raincy's cap shot off his head like a rocket, the guy-rope of a small tent flicked up, carrying its peg, and there was a rip of tearing canvas behind him. The cyclone struck with a yell.

Jorum clutched his Panama to his chest and bawled at Raincy,

through the shrieking of the storm. "C'lect your boys, Livingstone, and hook her down to the waggons; run like buttered lightning!"

Raincy loomed large as he turned and disappeared into the turbid grey veiling. A mouthful of flying sand filled Jorum's mouth and a piece of grit cut his cheek. He staggered and clutched at a flagpole; it cracked and fell across, missing his bald head by an inch. Coughing and choking, he staggered into the lee behind a groaning waggon that rocked on its wheels. A thud of horse hoofs came through the mist; a large black beast slithered onto its haunches, almost hitting the waggon; and a tall man in a frock coat and slouch hat flung himself forward to the ground almost over the horse's neck.

"You Jorum?" he gasped. "I'm Rolleston, Deputy Sheriff. Get the people clear of your tent, 'fore she sits down on 'em, d'you hear?"

"Too late, Deputy!" roared Jorum, across the stinging particles. "You'll only have a stampede and thousands trampled underfoot. You stay here with me and pray!"

"Pray! Hell!" The Deputy staggered off, holding his coat rucked up before his mouth. Jorum crouched back and watched a small marquee sail majestically overhead with its ropes trailing like dishevelled locks; it descended behind the waggon with a crash of broken glass and the anguished howling of a dog. Jorum, bent double, tried to crawl round the wheel of the waggon, when an immense flash of green lightning blazed in his eyes, followed by a tumbling cataract of thunder that reverberated among the peaks, and a solid sheet of rain that soaked him to the skin in a second and filled his mouth with wet hailstones. "Blessed are the meek!" he murmured. "For they know when to quit," and crawled on hands and knees under the waggon.

To whose credit it was that there was neither panic nor fatality in the big top that afternoon was never known (and Jorum did not exert himself to find out, having, he said, a horror of favouritism). The Santanis were on the trapeze when the cyclone struck the encampment and came down just four seconds before their net and ropes. A great wet triangle of jagged canvas curled in and hung down, twisting like the tongue of an impertinent giant,



letting in a waterspout upon the centre ring. Mr. Umberto, the equestrian director, gave one cry on his God; stepped back, putting a spurred heel through his silk hat, and sat down weeping. Four liberty horses waiting by the entry for their act, returned to the stables by a route of their own, that led them through clown alley, which they pierced and emerged decorated with spangled dresses, a broken drum and the pieces of several make-up tables. Luckily the announcers and the ring clowns kept their heads. The former by brazen bellowings that there was "absolutely no danger, folk; keep your seats and the Big Show will proceed in one minute!": the latter by flinging themselves gallantly into pyramids, cartwheels and any trick that could hold the attention of the wavering multitude, prevented the dreaded stampede. The canvas overhead heaved and flapped with a roaring like field guns in battery; the inner poles wobbled and danced like drunkards; and one whole section broke loose and swung out over the track, scattering the spectators around it shrieking. But the grooms, running together, herded them back to their broken seats with menace and reassurance, and soon the thunder-peals and the howling of the storm spirits seemed to paralyse spectators and players alike. Grooms, clowns, public stood or sat motionless as wax groups, with eyes straining towards the heaving grey roof above, small girls clinging to their fathers, who sat white-faced, biting through their extinguished cigars.

Outside in the yard and round the oblong of the big top the confusion was worse. There, dimly seen through the lashing mist of rain, the writhing, straining forms of Liv Raincy and his men toiled to secure the tent by knotting the ropes to the heavy waggons which no wind could overturn. The elephants had been led from their row to butt the waggons closer up to the canvas, but with the strengthening of the storm their grunting and squealing gave ominous signs of a stampede. No orders could be heard in the roar and surge of the cyclone; each man worked where and as he could, with the frenzy of fear for his personal safety.

Georgy, when the storm struck the circus, was halfway in changing from her parade costume to her *haute école* habit. She had had two experiences of cyclone in her American years and

did not wait. Breaking through the curtain that divided her dressing tent, already creaking and swinging, into two parts, she snatched up Pansy, fretfully protesting at being snatched from an orange she was quartering over a picturebook; and, queerly clad in boots and breeches with a silk dressing gown, dashed out into the driving hail with the child. Pansy raised a shrill outcry as the hailstones smote upon her soft cheeks, but her mother swiftly thrust her into the first heavy waggon they came to, where an acrobat's family of children were already huddled, chattering and arguing; and then, her silk dressing gown already soaked to a rag, buffeted her way to the horse tent.

Inside the flimsy canvas walls the scene was chaos. It was nearly as dark as night; the poles were vibrating and the roof drumming furiously with rain and hail. The dim figures of grooms rushed to and fro in the gloom, calling to the horses, who were stamping, tugging with angry rattles on their chains, rearing and showing terrified white eyeballs. Before she could reach to the end of the line where her horses stood, Georgy stumbled against something huddled on the floor; trying to disengage herself, she tangled her spur in the clinging dressing gown, and had perforce to stop to free it.

As she stooped, two black hands caught piteous hold of her robe and she found herself staring down into the wildly rolling eyes and gaping mouth of Jessamy, the Negro groom.

"Now don', Missus," he pleaded piteously, "don' you go for to strike dis whole outfit wid yo' anger! Yo' am plenty powerful, show de bowels of mussy too. Old Jessamy, he ain' none fit to go scrub de Great White Throne yet! Cause de storm to cease, Missus, I deplores you!

"Are you crazy, Jessamy?" panted Georgy. "Who do you think I am? Don't you know me?"

"I knows yo', plenty well, Missus, de mos' potent witch in all deseyar Disunited States. But Jessamy done nuff'n to thwart yo', Missus! I nollodges yo' magic from my heart."

"Oh! Let go of my gown, Jessamy. I hear Patrico calling me."

The Negro gave a squeal above the howling of the gale. "Don' let me for to hear de great black and white Debble speak to yo'; I will sholy die of de fantods ef I do! Tell de storm to done

cease and no one dare cross y' again, Missus, in all Jorum's outfit."

But before Georgy could tear away from his grip, there came an interruption that knocked him on his side, yelling. Through the side wall of the tent there broke, trumpeting furiously, a string of maddened elephants. Poles snapped, troughs were overturned, festoons of torn canvas fell from the roof, horses broke from their chains, slipped and rolled over, striking with frantic hoofs, as the huge beasts lurched through the havoc they had made and butted against the further wall to escape.

A great roll of canvas collapsed and fell like a screen between Georgy and the shrieking Negro. She reeled back, clutched wildly for support, and found herself clinging to Patrico's mane, shouting to him to stand still as he plunged forward in quivering panic. Abruptly a tall form reared over Patrico's back with forelegs striking out; she saw large eyes blazing with terror and made out the glimmer of Knight's white star. And then, in the dusty, flapping confusion, came a shock that jarred through every nerve in her body. For a loud authoritative voice, a familiar voice, roared through the squealing and the plunging. "Down, Knight, down!" and the frightened horse obeyed as if struck by a whip. Georgy whirled about, the fingers of one hand still twisted in Patrico's mane, and caught a glimpse of a grey head tied by a red handkerchief slipping away through the shadows. Then came a rush of light and air; the whole side wall had fallen, and into the stable streamed bright sunshine, flashing back from the pools and drops of rain on the ground and the waggons near by. The tornado had whirled away down the valley as swiftly as it had come; already it was no more than a purple patch veiling the far pinnacles of the lower hills. Inside the tent the havoc was dire; several horses lay on their sides, a groom had been kicked senseless; but his mates were busy catching the loose horses and chaining them to their stalls again. Many of the riders had also found their way to the tent by now and were seeking their own animals. As Jack Burgess, the jockey, followed by his brother who did the double act with him, was pushing past Georgy, he stopped at the look of her. "Why, Georgy!" he cried in dismay, "you look bad, old girl. You been hurt, my dear?"

"No Jack, no!" she sobbed; "not hurt, not hurt."

"What's jolted you then, little girl? Say, you seen a ghost maybe?"

"Heard one, Jack!" she cried. "Heard the dead! Oh, where's my baby, where's my Pansy?" She rushed with shaking knees out of the ruined tent.

2

There are limits to the powers even of circus folk. Jorum gave no second show that day. Raincy and his squad, after a few hours' rest, took down all the canvas and set to mending rents, binding damaged poles and replacing broken ones from store; the veterinary staff attended to the injured horses; the weary but lynx-eyed fixer discussed and whittled down the demands of the spectators who claimed damages for injuries to their persons, children, clothes and umbrellas. Jorum had a long private interview with the Deputy Sheriff, which resulted in that official pocketing a warrant unserved and riding off singing with a peculiarly felicitous expression. Afterwards the proprietor held a hymn-singing on the lot and took up a collection for the relatives of the groom who had expired from his injuries; he would not, he said, despise the nickel of the poorest comrade of our dear brother. And an hour earlier than had been anticipated, the circus trains pushed out of the valley which most of the company hoped never to see again.

Raincy, Kerrigan and a section of their staff, including the old hobo, were detained sewing canvas and helping to mend cars until the last train. As the old man boarded it after the performers, the two Bosses exchanged a few words. "Will you be taking the old bummer with us, then?" queried the Irishman.

"Let him go aboard," said Raincy, after sucking his teeth for a moment. "I'm not wise to his play yet. Seems like you patted the mem'ry clean out of the old fool with your lantern last night."

"And are you so simple as to think that? He is but biding his time."

"Well, if he asks for trouble, nothing easier than red-light him *ong roote*, I guess."

"Sure, Boss; he'll not be the first this trip."

"No, you're acquiring the touch of the connooser at shoving off sooperfluous passengers, Kerrigan. Meanwhile, he works well and we're short-handed."

Georgy had gone early to her sleeping car, which was the last on the performers' train, being equipped with the luxury of an observation platform, protected by tarnished gilt railings, at its rear. Jorum had his own glittering Pullman in the centre of the train so as to be at hand for all emergencies. Georgy's share of the last car was a sleeping compartment with two bunks, a smaller single one for the child, and a sitting room and lavatory; but it was long since her husband had shared her compartment, and she did not even trouble to know where he went on his long, furtive perambulations of the train after most of the fatigued travellers were asleep.

This night, as she buttoned her pyjama jacket with cold fingers, she felt more jarred and shaky than at any time since the stunning fall Patrico had given her, long ago, when she was a girl and a beginner. The voice she had heard shouting in the gloom and uproar of the storm-smitten horse tent still rang in her ears, but she could no longer decide whether it had been hallucination or reality. Was she growing subject to delusions? Surely not. Her pulse was steadier, her head clearer than that of any other woman in the circus. All those strange intuitions and misty dreams of her youth she had left behind—in Paris. But if, on the other hand, it was a mortal voice, where was its owner? It could not surely have been the little old man she thought she had discerned slipping away through the shadow? She was, indeed, by now beginning to wonder if that greybeard with the red handkerchief round his head ever really existed. She had interrogated the boss of every department she could find. The Hostler had curtly denied having such a hand; the Boss Animal Man knew him not. Boss Raincy of the Canvas Squad had looked at her suspiciously and murmured something about being unable to keep count of all the hobos who took odd jobs around a circus. "What might your interest be, marm, in this mutt with the red rag, if so be as he is honouring us?" he had added; and, feeling the bore of his evil black eyes, she had turned away without satisfying his curiosity.

For an hour, as the engine puffed among the peaks, she tortured

herself with imaginations; while, as a background to her questionings, the whole of her early life glimmered in pictures through her memory. Then, as the cars began to roll more smoothly down the gradients towards the plains, she fell off to sleep, only to be beset by abnormally vivid dreams. In one she was a child walking with her mother beside a sparkling river fringed by great trees. Amalia had her arm about her and an infinite peace and tenderness seemed to enwrap her. "So you're not dead! Of course, you're not dead!" she kept crying as she danced along, looking up into a face of brooding love. Flowers gleamed among the rushes, and to gather them she ran into the water, that did not wet her feet and bore her up airily. But the train checked and clanked and she woke with tears on her eyelids, to realise that the face of the dream-mother had no resemblance to that of the rigid Italian woman lying in the Yorkshire churchyard thousands of miles away.

She turned on her side with a deep sigh, pulling the blanket tightly over herself, and when she slept again, the dream was one of terror. She was in the Waxwork where she had met Rixen, but it was at the same time a real prison passage, and there passed down it a procession, a priest in surplice, warders, a pinioned man in black clothes with a white cap drawn right over his face. She screamed, the silent, straining gasp of the dreamer, and the chaplain said with grave displeasure, "Because your bunk is the scaffold." The prisoner stood with the rope round his neck; there was a click and the whole scaffold or bunk — which was it? — heaved and rocked as if about to turn over. "He's roasted," said the chaplain, putting on a clown's cap and beginning to play a banjolele, without impairing the solemn horror of the scene. There was a drumming sound beneath the scaffold. "It's his poor feet!" she cried. "Oh! Father! Father!" And, to her extreme anguish, a low voice came muffled through the white cap, "Georgy! Georgy! Georgy! Let me in! Do you hear! . . ."

She gripped the ledge of the bunk and sat up, staring round at the curtained windows, at her clothes swinging slowly from the pegs, at the white gleam of the electric lamp through the slit she had left when carelessly pulling the green shades together over it.



Tap! Tap! Tap! The knocking was continuing! Yes, it was on the bolted door at the back, leading to the observation platform. Then her breath stopped and she strained her ears. The voice was coming through too, hoarse and muffled by the wood, broken by the jolts and jars of the wheels. "Georgy, Georgy! Let me in! Wake up, girl! Georgy! I want you." Terror vanished, hesitation vanished. She leapt from the bunk like a hare, filled with joy, and flung open the door for her father.

They were descending the flank of a range; on the one side mounting rock, bathed in shadow, shut them in; on the other the ground fell away below the track to a wide landscape in which the dusky tufts of woods and the silver glint of rivers lay outlined in the radiance of a great moon set amid numberless stars in a pale sky. The summer night fragrance poured into the stuffy saloon as Georgy stood gazing at the thin cheeks, the rugged bones above them, the hungry fringe of grey whisker, clearly defined in the moon rays; and sought points of recognition in the squat bulldog nose, the sullenly protuberant jaw, the low forehead with its bumps and hollows — she remembered crisped flaxen curls on its dented crest, now bald with a few receding grey hairs. "*It is you, Father!*" she cried, stretching out her arms to embrace him, but he backed away to the railings of the platform.

"Better stand off, my girl!" he said gruffly. "I'm not agreeable to cuddle, — what do you expect?"

"Oh, Dad!" In an access of maternal tenderness, she locked him in her striped silk arms. For an instant, the reek of his unwashed clothing and ill-cared-for body polluted her nostrils; then, as she hugged him tighter for this momentary repulsion, she recognised the distinctive, virile scent of his person, as it had often come to her mingled with the odour of cigar smoke or expensive hair pomade when, as a tiny child, she had rubbed her face against his stiff cheeks. She stooped from her height above him to let her head fall on his shoulder, and clung to him, shaken with soft sobs while the moving platform rocked beneath their swaying bodies.

"Dad," she whispered into his ear, "you know about Mother?"

"I read," he said gruffly, "in one of our papers. Poor woman! She died painless, didn't she? That's best."

"So you see," she murmured, "there's just you and I, and I've to take care of you." He patted her shoulder with a reluctant tenderness, and fresh sobs came.

"There, girl, there!" said Dufay at length huskily, disengaging himself. "I never thought I'd go womanish like this again." He rubbed his eyes with begrimed knuckles. "I knew you were a good little gal, Georgy, but I never thought you cared this much."

"Else you'd have come back sooner, darling, wouldn't you?" She put out a hand again and drew him back to her. "But I've got you and I sha'n't let you go again, you may be sure."

"Don't talk silly, Georgy!" He freed himself almost roughly. "What's a filthy hobo like me to do with a fine woman like you've become?"

"What's my Dad got to do with his daughter? You can't ask that seriously, Father?"

He was about to speak: then paused, listening alertly. "What was that?" he asked. "Some one moving in your car? Is that German husband of yours in there?"

"No! He never comes, Father. There's no one." They listened a moment and soon made out that the creeping sound which had disturbed him was the swish of her overcoat swinging on its peg.

"That's all right!" he said. "Now, Georgy, you and me must have a crack. Lots to tell you and I mustn't stay too long. Wrap yourself in that overcoat; it's none too warm for pyjamas out here, and sit down with me." He pulled his broken-stemmed briarwood pipe out of his pocket and looked at her ruefully. "You wouldn't have pipe tobacco, of course, would you?"

"I'll break a packet of Otto's," she answered, darting into the saloon for a moment. When she came back, he was sitting on the step down from the platform behind, where a sliding rail made an exit, his feet swinging over the ties that flitted by beneath. "Take the wicky chair!" he said briefly, ordering her as if only yesterday he had parted from the schoolgirl.

She obeyed and pulled the chair up close, watching as he struck a match to light the pipe. The flame flared on the tired-out colourless eyes that she remembered pale-grey, approaching the colour of her own; then it expired and only the bowl glowed red below the dark lump of his bullet-head. He gave a deep sigh. "Not had a

smoke like this for a while and a bit, I can tell you, girl. Yes . . . well . . ." He took the pipe from his lips. "Georgy, before we talk about me, I must say, you've surprised me. I always suspected, somehow, you might be a good plucked one, 'cos you never squealed when I had to thrash you . . . but, you've surprised me. You've made good, my girl, do you realise it? You're proved and worthy to be the daughter of Frederick George Dufay — him that was, I mean."

"I'm glad you're pleased with me, Father! Now you'll stay, won't you, and teach me such a lot more, just as in the old days. I don't mind, Dad, if you wallop me still!"

"Cut that! You don't know what you're saying. But that Captive Act of yours is dandy. I watched you. Of course you know and I know it's nothing more nor less really than the old Mazeppa stunt you've seen me do all up and down England. Still, you've made it new, and I reckon Menken, though I never see her, couldn't have done no better with it."

"But you must find something new for me, Father. Jorum's getting tired of the Captive already. You will, won't you?"

"Me? . . . George, I'm a bloody old fool and I'm bluffing you. I can't teach you nothing. My Mazeppa was nothing like your Captive. You've got me beat. I hated to own it to my own daughter; but Lord, what does it matter now? Teach? You could teach Frederick George Dufay! There, that's the truth. Now, say no more about it."

He was silent awhile, making smoke rings in the moonlight. The train sped through a forest of ghostly birches.

"Father," said Georgy, a little timidly, "why do you talk as if you couldn't come back to me? I've lots of money, you know."

"With that husband? I doubt it. Georgy, how could you pick such a rotten orange from the tub? You've clearly no horse sense outside the ring!"

"Ah! don't let's start on that — now, Father. I want to talk about you. I tell you, I can set you up!"

"And me live on you? Bloody likely! On my own child!"

"Work then, if you want to! It's not hard for me to get you any job you want."

He spread his tattered arms, a moonbeam gleaming livid on

the flesh between the rents. "I look like getting a good job, don't I?"

"You forget this isn't England, Dad. They don't ask here where a man comes from, but what he's up to."

"I don't need you to teach me my geography, thank you, Georgy." His voice softened. "You mean well, Georgy. But, you see, you don't know yet why I went away."

"I know something, Father!"

"How could you?"

"From Otto, who met you in Berlin. From Joe Rixen, who threatened me —"

"He been on your track too? Ah! The filthy devil! If I could twist his neck! If I dared, if I dared!" He rose unsteadily on the shaking step, his shoulders heaving, as he clenched and unclenched his fingers on the neck of an imaginary victim. Georgy shrank back with a cry. "Don't, Father! You look dreadful." Dufay glared about him; then put his hand to his throat, and sat down heavily on the step. "Where's my pipe?" he murmured. "Ah, thank God I didn't drop it overboard. Got a refill of that swab's tobacco? Thanks!" He stuffed the pipe to the brim with a ferocious grin. "I like to plunder him, seeing how I can guess he's plundered you. Now, then, you listen. Whatever any one's told you, this is the truth! You remember, when you was quite a kid at the Sisters' School and your mother's rheumatics was that bad she had to give up riding, I went alone to Paris for a winter engagement; then I stayed on a bit for a holiday at Fontainebleau, shooting round the forest there?"

"I remember well, Dad."

"Truth is — this your mother never knew — I was with a party of gipsies, old Nebo's lot. We had some sport; but our real sport, Georgy, was in the evenings round the fire — the cards!"

"I don't remember ever seeing you touch a card, Father!"

"No, I took good care of that. I'd come to grief as a youngster with them damned pictures and I swore off, until that Easter . . . and for ever afterwards, yes, for ever afterwards . . . till last night, in fact, but that's another tale. It was Rixen that tempted me to play. He'd been with me at the Grand Cirque and it was he introduced me to old Nebo and the gipsies. Then, one night,

I don't know how, we started playing. After that Rixen stayed with us. Seemed to me the game never stopped; them gipsies is hell for gambling; nothing can tire 'em. After about a week none of us is much up on the others; so Rixen says this is dull and he'll ask leave to bring a friend next night. He goes to Paris and comes back with a rich fellow, well enough known about the town in those days, kind of amatoor trainer —— ”

“Dudley Robertshaw?”

Dufay let his hands drop on his knees and stared at his daughter. “What do *you* know of Robertshaw? . . . But never mind, we'll hear later what you know. I'm telling *you*, just now, remember. This Robertshaw arrives, a puffy fellow and soft; sporty clothes, and always drenched all over, sickeningly, in scent—what's the name of the stuff he'd use? Ah! Jockey Club, some Parisian mixture —— ”

“Wait a minute, Father!” said Georgy abruptly. “Jockey Club! Now where have I heard that spoken of?”

“Oh! Don't keep interrupting, girl!”

“Yes, Father, I must remember. It's to do with Rixen, you see. Oh, of course! It was in Paris too. I was rehearsing, Dad, at the Cirque d'Or with that big horse of mine, Patrico, the piebald I do the Captive with. He was bad-tempered in those days. Rixen bobbed up suddenly by the ringside and frightened him badly somehow, getting me off him. A friend of mine who saw it and thought I was hurt fought Rixen on the spot.”

“Good. Knocked the cur out good and true, I hope?”

“Good *and* true, Father, as you say. But here's the point. It's only come back this moment. While I was patching him up a bit afterwards, for he'd had some knocks, Darrell . . . Mr. Carless . . . my friend, that is, said, ‘I don't mind a fist in my face, but I draw the line when it reeks of Jockey Club.’ ”

“Rixen's not one for scent, or soap, either.”

“Still, it's a coincidence.”

“Call it what you like, it's not to the point that I can see. Heaps of pros. use Jockey Club, I dessay—I only remember the scent because I've heavy reason to remember the man. Soon as he joins our camp, luck seems to go to him; it often does, I've noticed, to

the plumb fool of the party. But I was pretty hot-tempered in those days, as maybe you'll remember; and there was plenty of drink going in that camp, I can tell you — doped, I've since believed, without much doubt. About the third night I get a suspicion that Robertshaw's not playing on the square . . . again I don't doubt now that it was Rixen rigged it. But I'd been losing . . . well, enough to eat up three good seasons' profits, and, flying in a red rage, I up and went for Robertshaw with a little life-preserver I always carried in case the gipsies should turn nasty; you can't ever trust them. I got in a crusher on this poor fat fool; luckily he turns his shoulder to it; Rixen and 'tothers comes between us; we wrestle over the embers of the fire and burn our ankles. This turns us sober and we patch up the quarrel, Robertshaw with a bruise like a purple half-crown on his white flesh just below the shoulder here.

"The next night's play fairly cleans me out and I leave the camp and go to a little inn on the edge of the forest a couple of miles away to think out my position. It comes on me more strongly than ever that I've been bamboozled by this sharp — flat I now see he was. So I send a boy from the inn with a polite note asking Mr. Robertshaw to meet me by the three beeches, a sort of landmark we all knew well, half a mile or so from the camp, at five next morning and talk over the settlement privately. My idea is if he comes, and he must, to get my I.O.U.'s honoured, I'll persuade him as a gentleman to give back what's not fairly won. If he won't, well, I mean to take it; and if I have to hurt him just enough to make him docile, well, I wasn't the fellow to shrink from that — in those days."

"Did he come, Father?"

"Don't chip in! I find him at the place I'd named, all right, lying under the beeches, dead! At first I can't see how. Then I find his neck's broken, big swollen bruise, here. But I still can't see how it happened. There's no footprints, though there's marks of horsehoofs round about; but by what I can track, and I'm no Sexton Blake, there's been a whole troop around. That part of the forest, moor it is really, is full of wild ponies and cattle. Then I think of something more practical. My money, my I.O.U.'s! I turn out his pockets; his case is stuffed full of 'em. I take them,



take all that's on him — lifting from a corpse isn't robbery, by my lights — and I prefer to make it look a plain hold-up. Then I'm away without a soul seeing me go or come.

"But when I get back to my inn I have two shocks. First is, I meet a Frenchman, Dussault, who's looking for me everywhere to buy a little mare of mine he'd fancied in the ring. He'd tracked me somehow from the gipsy camp, and I've often and often thought he suspected something fishy. He could see I was flustered." ("Now I understand his hints," thought Georgy.) "But the second is worsel!" pursued Dufay. "When I get rid of this Dussault, I find one of my sleeve links snapped. Your mother had got those ones made for me, one end a four-leaved shamrock, the other my initial 'D.' I sat down and tried to think out how it had got broken. . . . Then comes an idea that makes me run cold. It darts into my mind that I'd had to tug to get the case out of Rob.'s pocket and caught my sleeve on a torn bit of lining. If they find that bit of gold with my initial on the body or near it, there's their clue. I wasn't long in getting across Channel, you can bet; and I read all I could — it was only little paragraphs — about what the papers called the 'French Forest Mystery.' I began to breathe easy; for no one seems to have any idea but the vague one of footpads or Apaches; and, believing I've got away with it, I swear before God never to dabble in such things again. Georgy, I was deluding myself. About a month after Joe Rixen strolls into my office that I then had in London in Long Acre and produces my note, asking Robertshaw to meet me at the three beeches. Like a fool I'd forgotten about that piece of evidence, and yet it seems it was crumpled into Robertshaw's pocket with the torn lining, had slipped down inside. I ask Rixen how he comes by it. He tells me coolly he spent an hour with the body between my finding it and giving the office to the police. 'Things would look black for you, my friend,' he croaks, 'if I told all I know.' And he points out that he was witness to my assault on Robertshaw with the life-preserver and can explain the bruise on his shoulder; the instrument that did that might make the bruise on the neck, striking from behind. At first, in my madness, I collared Rixen in the office, trying to get the note from him; but he was too strong for me and besides threatened to call 'Police!' Then he

tells me the French police have discovered the broken sleeve link in the man's pocket. When I heard that, I felt I was finished. 'If they've the link,' I said, 'you needn't come blackmailing here; my arrest's certain, though I swear I never saw the man till he was cold.' 'Not necessarily,' Rixen answers. 'It depends on whether I speak. Your initial's "D", it's true; but p'raps you've forgotten so's that of Robertshaw's first name, Dudley. The coppers think — at present — it's a bit of some jewel of his. They needn't think otherwise, F. G., so long as you and me are friends. But if I explain the initial, and add the note, things, as I say, would look black for you.' "

"Rixen asked me for a four-leaved shamrock you might have left behind," put in Georgy breathlessly.

"Trying to strengthen his evidence, of course. I kept a packet of his letters, written from Paris, just after the affair, that would prove the blackmailer he is, for years. I always engaged him, over-paid him, and he was always bleeding me for loans. Then came my smash at the Coburg Palace, you remember. I was about mad; the shame of the bankruptcy, your mother and Imperiali — never mind that now — and on top of it Rixen swearing he'd have all my assets for his claim against the other creditors. He told me that night the French police weren't letting the thing die down, in spite of the years that had passed. A new sharp from the *Sûreté*, he said, was actually in England poking about. So I bolted. It was the stupidest thing to do now, I see, for it made Rixen implacable, and I daren't ever reappear; he'll be on me."

There was a silence, and the train rattled across a spider bridge over a mountain river calling clamorously from below.

"Robertshaw, father," said Georgy at length, "once owned, or tried to own, my horse Patrico. I learnt that in Paris. Patrico, of course, is the famous Aldebaran. You've heard of him?"

"That true?" Dufay looked up with a gleam of fresh interest. "Of course I've heard of Aldebaran, though I never knew that poor devil bought him in. When? Was it after Stultz retired? Stop a minute, though. There was some backchat about a wonderful horse he meant to get between him and Rixen; I didn't give much ear to it, had my own troubles thick enough. Yes, Rixen was always chipping Rob for riding like the sack of feathers

he was. Robertshaw would pipe out curses and swear he'd ride the worst-tempered horse Rixen could bring into the ring. I doubted it, by the look of him; but it was no pidgeon of mine." He lapsed into his brooding again.

Georgy laid her hand on his sleeve to rouse him. "Listen, Father! I didn't interrupt, since you told me not to, but Barlowe, my first boss, bought Patrico from Grandfather Nebo the gipsy, and Nebo's nephew or grandnephew, a lad I met at Reading, gave me a hint that Patrico had once killed a man."

Dufay sharply raised his head. "That's queer! There's a trail to follow there! But what's the use? It's too late." He shrugged dejected shoulders once again.

"But, Father, listen! Did you know that after Robertshaw's death Aldebaran was seen running wild across the forest and disappeared? Didn't you hear the rumours? Didn't you read the papers?"

"I was in England, you forget, and not anxious to show myself in any way interested. I read what I could get from the English papers: as I told you, it wasn't much. I never went to France again, you'll understand that."

"Father, Patrico killed Robertshaw. Yes, I know it; I know what Patrico is when he's savage. It takes something in horse flesh to give me a spill, but he can. And, Dad, that broken neck—an awkward faller, like your Robertshaw, drunk too, perhaps. Isn't that possible?"

"All fancies, Georgy. How did he come by the horse out there? Why should he be riding him? Rixen's case is too strong for such cobwebs."

"But if I can put Rixen himself in the dock?"

"Don't rave, girl! If the horse did for Rob it was the fool's own conceited fault in trying to ride him. Rixen's not guilty."

"I think he certainly is. He knows the horse. He has some queer power over him. Why, don't you see, it's plain as anything? Rixen meant Patrico to savage me that day in the Cirque d'Or, as he did Robertshaw in the forest."

In her excitement Georgy had risen, letting her coat slip off her shoulders. Dufay gazed up in admiration at her tall form in slim pyjamas.

"You ought to have been a boy, George. I do believe you'd have been one too much for Rixen, then."

3

There was a jarring of brakes and the train began to slow; it passed out cautiously onto another of the dizzy hanging bridges that abound in that part of the line. And father and daughter both forgot their own affairs for a moment in the majesty of the spectacle that gleamed in the bright moonshine. The iron bridge spanned an immense tumultuous waterfall. It poured through a cleft in the mountains above and was split in the middle by a point of black rock rising from the bed. The overhanging ledges of the precipices on each side and this jagged column cut off in the midst of the boiling flood suggested the shattered arches of a giant's bridge. "Oh, look, Father, look!" cried Georgy, pointing to the summit of the right-hand cliff. Dufay stared up as she directed. Noiselessly as a spirit, an Indian on a huge black horse had ridden out of the woods above the precipice and now sat motionless on his steed at the very lip of the gulf that flashed white with foam in the ghostly light. He and his well-trained horse were still as if carved from dark basalt. What was he doing? Praying to some Spirit of the Fall? Meditating a dreadful leap to destruction? Dufay and his daughter stared in silence at the mysterious figure, while the train puffed across the vibrating suspension bridge and plunged into a tunnel beyond.

As they emerged again, leaving the noise of the torrent faint behind them. Dufay smiled grimly at Georgina. "A Devil's Bridge, eh?" She gave a sudden exclamation, and her eyes shone in the moonlight. "Thank you, Father," she cried, "I've got it!"

"Got what, girl? Are you mad?"

"My new act, Father! What did you call it, the Bridge of Death? The Devil's Bridge? No, the Devil's Gap, it should be! That's it! The cliffs . . . the waterfall! Jorum will build it for me; Patrico will jump it!"

Dufay gripped her arm. "Steady, my girl! You've bones to break, remember. It's damned bad showmanship to get killed, let an old trouper tell you."

Georgy sat down, still adream. "It's no use your trying to stop me, Father; I'm of age, if ever I shall be. GEORGINA DUFAY IN THE DEVIL'S GAP. I can see the bills. I'll astonish Jorum yet."

The old man looked at her and a faintly affectionate smile twitched at his sardonic lips. "Well, you're grown up now, and as you say you've a right to fix your own programmes. Whatever this fine new idea of yours is, I sha'n't be there to see it."

"Oh! Father, how can you be so cruel? I've found you by sheer, wonderful luck, after all these years of hoping, and you can think of deserting me again at once. Don't you even want to see your granddaughter?"

"Kids? I was never one for kids particularly. But I'll own I might have planned things different, but for a piece of bad luck — my luck, naturally."

"What piece of bad luck ought to separate us two, Dad?"

"I played cards last night — the first time since the forest — with that blackguard snipe of a husband of yours, and I plucked him to the tailfeathers. I knew I wasn't robbing *you*; it wouldn't a been *you* he'd have spent them dollars on. With the sum I lifted off him it seemed to me p'raps you and me, Georgy, might have gone away together for a bit. I could have rested and perhaps planned a quiet end to my life. But Mister Raincy and those toughs of the canvas squad got wind of my luck; they slugged me in the yard — it's lucky my head's always been a remarkable tough one — and went through me while I was senseless in the car. I've not a cent."

"The brutes! But we'll get it all back, Dad. I'll go straight to Jorum when he wakes and he'll put the circus detective on."

"Huh! Still a blessed little innocent, aren't you? S'pose the 'tec hasn't had his wad of my bills already? S'pose Jorum can afford to split with Raincy, who does all his bullying for him while he holds his prayer meetings? And all for the sake of a broken-down tie-crawler?"

"But when he knows who you are, Father —"

"It'll get round like glanders in a menagerie. Then I'll have Rixen on me in a cough. It's no use your arguing, Georgy. I wonder you don't know me yet, my child. I'm satisfied — in a

manner. I've seen you make good, and I never would have believed it could make me feel so warm inside, and, I'm free to say it, proud. It's what my training's done for you, after all, isn't it? Besides, you know now the truth about what happened in that damned forest, and it eases me somehow that my own child should know I'm not a felon. Now I'll tramp the old road again to the finish. . . . It's no earthly manner of good you blubbering like that, girl!"

"No, I suppose it's not." Georgy sprang to her feet with wet eyes and flaming cheeks. "But perhaps I've got a bit of a will too. If you don't promise to stay, Father, I'll wake the train now and make them keep you till you come to your senses. My word goes a bit too in this show, as well as Boss Raincy's."

She darted for the interior of the car; he caught at her arm, but with a muscular wrench she freed herself, and in a hoarse tone he begged her to pause. "Listen a minute!" he murmured peevishly, rubbing his wrist. "S'pose you think you're getting too strong for me, as well? But if I'd wanted to put out my strength, old as I look —"

"Are you going to stay, Father?" she demanded obstinately, still poised in the doorway to the car.

"Come out here and talk sense!" he pleaded. "Well, then," he added as she hesitated, "I'll undertake to think about it, if you promise not to start squalling. I'm going back over the roofs now to my car; I've a job to tackle there. In the morning you'll know how I decide. Come! What good is it to either of us to make a uproar? Want to see me taken off this train in handcuffs, maybe?"

She came slowly back to the platform in discouraged perplexity.

"I want you to lend me a good length of rope," he said.

"What on earth for?"

"To tie something up!" he exploded. "God damn the girl! Have I got to answer for every move to you, you little squirt?"

She shrugged her shoulders, feeling helpless as a child before his bleak obstinacy.

"I don't think I have a rope."

"One of them contraptions you use in the show!"

"Give you my apparatus? It's worth thousands to me, Father."

"Well, think of something else, can't you?"



"I'll unrope Pansy's wooden box, if you really need a cord."

"Don't I tell you? Hurry! Look at the moon. I don't want to be caught slithering over the roofs by daylight."

She brought him the coil of stout cord, and he wound it away round his waist with a grunt of contentment. "Good-bye," he said at length, regarding her squarely with jaw out-thrust. "You remember what I told you: don't you be a foolhardy fool; it isn't business."

The next minute, with astonishing agility, he had clambered on to the flaking gilt railing and thence swung himself to the corner of the roof. She saw, silhouetted against the pale blue night, the frayed end of his trousers and his square, misshapen boot. Then the stars flickered across vacancy, and she was alone with the clicketing of the couplings and the jig-jog of the wheels. Sighing, she returned to her bunk and drew up the coverlet once more, beating her brains to think of arguments that might soften his crazy resolve in the morning.

After about half an hour sleepiness slowed down and paralysed her thoughts; but she awoke once or twice to see the lights of stations whirl by as the train sped at last freely through the plains, and once she was roused with a jolt at a stoppage. Voices of men went past her window on the line, and she heard the jeering laugh of Boss Raincy. "All right, old-timer," he said, "let's see this pheenomenon." Steps went back towards the front of the train once more; she sat up and lifted the edge of the stiff leather blind to look. It was dawn, but there was nothing to be seen except a thick grey mist. The engine clanged a dismal bell and the train glided forward. The dim shapes of station buildings, lit with hazy yellow lights, swam by and vanished as she dropped the blind again.

At her next waking it was full day and the train had stopped at a large junction. White-aproned Negroes were carrying pots of coffee and piles of rolls down the platform shouting, and Georgy heard some one say, "Eighteen minutes halt here." Swiftly she grasped at her clothes on the pegs. She had formed her plan. She would walk down the train, find Raincy or Kerrigan; tell them that the old hobo was a former employee of her father and that she wanted him looked after until she could arrange something

for him; and bribe them not to let him go or injure him again. As soon as she was dressed, she descended and hurried towards the front of the train. She found Kerrigan with two or three men looking glum and menacing. At her first questions, the Irishman blazed out. "It's ourselves would be mighty pleased to set eyes on the old omadhaun, ma'am," he said. "Maybe you can tell us where he's hidin' his dhirtzy carcass?"

Georgy stiffened at his insolence. "He's in your squad, isn't he, and you're responsible. Where's your Boss?"

The men laughed sardonically. "Houly sowls!" ejaculated Kerrigan. "But 'tis the Boss we're axing for! D'you think we'd be for puttin' mournin' on for that lousy old sewer-rat that I had it in mind to red-light myself before mornin', if I could get ahint him for a shove on a high bridge anywheres. But he's gone, and the Boss too, and I'd be mighty glad, ma'am, if youse that appears so anxious about him could tell us what monkeying he's been at."

"Seems like a *double* act in the red-lighting line?" suggested a hand gloomily.

"He would never throw Liv off a train with those mouldy old arms."

"He had a strength on him, though ——" attested the canvasman.

Georgy went cold. "You mean to tell me you plotted to chuck him off the train in the night, you brutes? I've heard of your games. If you don't produce my fa—friend safe and well, I'll raise hell for you, Mr. Kerrigan; yes, I'll have you in the chair for murder, before I've done."

"Mighty obleeged, ma'rm, but I don't think it's me for the hot-squat yet. Who paid me to dry-nurse your fa—friend, I'd beg to enquire? This all comes of kapin' us behint our squad, putting sticking plaster on p'rade cars and sewing serviettes. If we'd been all safe together on our own thrain ahead, 'twould none of it have happened. . . . But this backchat is no way to bring Liv home." He scratched his poll. "I hate to rouse the Old Man with news of this sort. It don't reward the bringer any, that's sure."

There was a silence in which the dull chink of a brakeman passing down the train testing the wheels was heard. Suddenly he stopped short and gave a loud hail. The canvasmen turned.

"Come here, boys!" he bawled. "What's this lashed to the couplings?" Kerrigan, Georgy, the men, ran to where he pointed down between two middle coaches.

"Hell, it's the Boss! I know that patch on his pants!" Kerrigan barged in between the cars and with his clasp-knife began to hack at the stout cord — the cord of Pansy's box, as Georgy realised — which was swathed with marvellous cunning round a sack from which two limp legs in grey flannel dangled, and was then secured with intricate knots to the couplings.

"Gee! Has Liv rode the last hundred miles in that *saloon de looxe*?" exclaimed one of the men. "He'll be pulped to jelly, you'll see!"

"He's alive!" growled Kerrigan, who had torn away the sacking and examined the senseless form of the Boss, his eyeballs gleaming white, his face pallid beneath the dirt, his long black locks, sweat-matted, streaked across his forehead. "Get a bucket of water, some of you, and throw it on him," he said, straightening himself and turning to the crowd of railway hands and travelers that had gathered round. "What I would like to be tould," continued the Irishman wrathfully, "is how the ould divil contrived to put it across Liv and truss him up like this without one of us hearing a sound? Houdini couldn't break out of them knots."

"I saw the two of them go off together along the train when we stopped in that fog about daybreak," said a man. "They was thick as dear brothers and Liv laughing."

"Happen he'll laugh the other side of his mug, when he comes round," ruminated a second bystander.

"Happen that if I lay hands on the ould sandbagger, *he'll* not be able afterwards to pick out the part of his face God gave him to laugh with!" flamed the Irishman.

"You'll not lay a finger on him, Kerrigan!" said a clear voice. Georgy had pushed herself to the front of the craning, prying crowd again. "If he's found, you'll keep away from him, you and all your precious crew, or else ——"

"Else, what, my lady?"

"Else I'll tell Mr. Jorum a little tale of a red lantern *and* a roll of dollar bills."

There was a sticky silence.

"Hell's giblets!" bellowed the furious Irishman at length. "Is this the way to be finding the assassin? We'll talk over the brush when we've caught our ould grey fox. Run you-all paralytic beggars; search every nook of this train or I'll be afther you, to sharpen your noses with a file. Where's the Boss of the Depot to telephone along the line we've come?"

Neither searching nor telephoning, however, yielded any disclosures; and Georgy, at the end of the next few days, which put her hundreds of miles from the scene of Dufay's disappearance, was forced to conclude that, carrying out with cunning literality his promise that she should know how he had decided in the morning, her father had vanished once more into the scattered army of black ants that toils along the endless American highroads, or paces by night from sleeper to sleeper on the railway track, or lurks for stolen rides in coal trucks and cattle waggons.

Only, she felt, in the punishment he had inflicted upon Raincy, had he left her a message. With his mingled strength and craft, it would have been easy for him to have procured the death of the Boss without being made responsible for the "accident." Yet here was Raincy, hobbling about on a stick, his knees swathed in bandages, one arm strapped to his side, his black hair streaked with grey, his rasping voice tamed to a blasphemous whisper, daunted undoubtedly — he never became again the tyrant he had been — but alive. It was as though Dufay had wished to echo for his own part the assertion the boy Pedro had made on behalf of Patrico: "You see, I am not a killer."

4

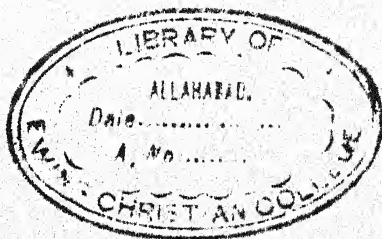
It was many weeks after Jorum's trains had passed that way that a group of plate-layers, repairing a lofty embankment which had given way under some days' unexpected heavy rain, were sitting in the dank early-autumn silence at their midday meal. One of them, turning languid eyes from the first flush of red leaves against the grey sky in the distant woods, espied, at the foot of the thirty-foot bank, where the low-lying grassland had turned to soggy marsh with a bright-green scum, a black object sticking

up. "Some guy's left his boot," he remarked and began to shy pebbles at it. One of them struck the mark and its resilient solidity made the aimer peer forward again. "Wrong!" he said. "Guy's still in his boot." He and his mates slithered perilously down the steep bank, and after some minutes' difficult work that covered their picks and themselves with viscid slime, they fished on to firm ground an object over which they gloated with fearful horror. "Guess there'll be no identification," murmured the foreman at length, pulling his fascinated eyes away. "Throw a rag over it, one of you good boys, and you, Shorty, stagger up yonder and make tracks for the P section switch cabin. He'll telephone depot."

"Them hobos is a lot too precipitous," said one of his mates, feeling for a pipe. "They hops on to trains oninverted and irreflective; they hops off again without looking what puddle they're stepping into, and this yere's the strictly calc'lable consequence. D'you reckon, now, *this* one, mebbe, had a family?"

"Man of birth," said the foreman briefly, "like the rest of us; yet I'll lay it's the first time in his inglorious career that he has, in a manner of speaking, arrested the public gaze. All same, these flittin' visitors pesters a self-respecting Railroad Corporation worse'n bluebottles does the cook of the Astoria. I reckon there's a tidy sum waiting for any perfessor that'll patent a flypaper warranted to catch hobos."

In a few minutes the picks were resuming their muffled thuds in the damp air.



## CHAPTER THREE

### I

THE telephone on Jorum's desk jarred and he unhooked the receiver. "Yeah!" he said after a moment. "Shoot him up right away. Yeah! By appointment."

He hooked up and turned to Mr. Umberto, who was sitting twisting his moustache and staring through the twenty-second storey windows at the wintry panorama of New York, roofs and spires sparkling against a clear blue. "Well, Saffelli," said Jorum, throwing a pile of papers to the side of his desk, "you've got your notes, and if you'll step through the glass door to the stenographer's department I guess you can dictate those orders right away."

The Italian fluttered the leaves of his large notebook. "You want a much stronger letter to the horse-feed people?" he enquired.

"Tell 'em Leonidas Jeremy Jorum farmed in New Jersey while their directors were suckin' bottles in a row, and can tell the difference between oats and shredded splinters."

Saffelli gave one of his sour grins. "Am I to draft the letter to Professor Heinzellmann of Vienna?"

"Sure! But let me read it carefully before it goes. Bein' Director of the State Opry House in that home of fallen grandeur he may kick a little at arranging the tournament number for a circus. But I just gotta have him for the name. It's all a matter of stroking."

Saffelli nodded and shut his notebook. "Seems to me, Chief, you got everything settled now for March except your sensation number."



"Well, Mr. Saffelli, come back in ten minutes, and I'll mebbe have fixed that likewise." There was a knock on the door and the Equestrian Director went through behind Jorum's desk to the secretary's room.

"Come," cried Jorum, and a small page, half-obliterated by rows of glittering buttons, tumbled breathlessly into the room and, after panting a minute for utterance, shrieked, "Mr. Riegelmann!"

"Say, boy," expostulated Jorum, "you'd lose a lot less time if you wouldn't hustle so." The child looked at him in terrified bewilderment for a second; and then was heard rushing back along the passage to the elevator, as Jorum rose to greet Otto Riegelmann, freshly shaved and pomaded, looking sprucer than usual in a new blue frieze coat and pearl-grey hat. "Come right in, Mr. Riegelmann," said Jorum; "help yourself to a pew. I was slightly surprised by your letter; yes, sirree, I'm free to own it. I have been asking what has changed me or Mrs. Riegelmann that she now does business with me by deputy."

"I can explain, Mr. Jorum," said Otto hurriedly, unbuttoning his grey glove. "Georgina would haf been glad to accompany me but for a bad chill she took at practising yesterday. The radiators at Gerry's are out of order; you can imagine what it is like in this frost."

"What need," grumbled Jorum, "has Mrs. Riegelmann to practise in an antiquated barn like Gerry's, halfway to Hoboken, when my winter quarters are always open for her without a cent of hire; and with electric heating that don't play tricks for a snap of blizzard."

Otto gave a fat smile. "You are man of business, Mr. Jorum. You sometimes want prifacy of your practice more than anything else—especially if you haf been producing a new and stupendous sensation."

"As Mrs. Riegelmann has been doing this winter?"

"As *we* haf been doing, Mr. Jorum. May I smoke?" he fingered his gold-tipped cigarettes with hands that shook.

"Sure. I've seegars in that cabinet . . . but I see you're fitted. Might I enquire what Mrs. Riegelmann has been devising to enthrall Jorum's world-wide public this season?"

"Certainly, Mr. Jorum, when we haf negotiated our terms."

Jorum eyed him keenly. Otto's shifty eyes were running along the ceiling of the office.

"Are you authorised to negotiate on behalf of Mrs. Riegelmann?"

Otto spread indignant arms. "But naturally; I am her husband, am I not, Mr. Jorum?"

"Well, I guess she can't escape from that hard fact, Mr. Riegelmann. I'm attentive, sir."

Otto hesitated. "I am authorised, Mr. Jorum," he began slowly, "to gif you, on terms, the first option on a new and staggering sensation-act that I haf prepared for my wife, to be called *THE DEVIL'S GAP*."

"A jumping act, Mr. Riegelmann?"

"In a sense . . . naturally . . . as the title explains."

"Oh, I heard the *title* . . . Is that all *you* know about it too, Mr. Riegelmann?"

"But I haf told you, Mr. Jorum, I am the inventor of the act."

"Gee, I would like to see you jumpin' abysses on Patrico's on-easy spine, Mr. Riegelmann."

"You don't understand. I haf arranged the trick and trained the horse. Of course, my wife rides him."

"How? Where to? You're not kidding yourself that Jorum's the man to buy a black cat in the dark, blindfold?"

"But, of course, you will know all about the trick, Mr. Jorum, when you haf agreed to buy the option."

Jorum wearily put out his plump hand to the telephone. "I'm sorry, Mr. Riegelmann; I'm plumb choked with callers this morning."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Jorum." There was a triumphant glitter in the German's shallow blue eyes. "Don't you go and do yourself an injury. If you are so suspicious that we haf not the goots to sell, there are others who trust us. They don't, like you, expect us to gif away our secrets, the secrets of our thought and toil, with no assurance of reward."

"And who are these believing centurions, Mr. Riegelmann?"

"What would you say to Hooper and Marcossan?"

"I should say you'd been over-indulging the lifting habit of the elbow, sir!"

"Then read that!" Otto lugged a fat pocketbook out of his breast pocket and flung down a letter typed on thin, business paper. Jorum flipped it open carelessly, but stiffened as he saw a well-known heading, a medallion of a black horse with a white ballet dancer pirouetting on its bare back. His shaggy eyebrows lifted and he read the contents of the letter.

Madam Georgina Dufay (Mrs. Otto Riegelmann).

DEAR MADAM,

We are informed from a source that it is not perhaps necessary to mention that you have for some time been practising at Gerry's Amphitheatre a new act, said to outrival any of the sensation tricks which have made you known to so wide a public in the past.

If you are able to confirm this news, we should be very glad to take an interest in your new venture. We are not in a position to propose bedrock terms until we have seen the act of which our informants speak so highly, but, in view of your unique standing in the Circus world, we have no hesitation in offering you right away a retaining fee of \$5,000 for the option on the act in question.

Trusting to hear from you immediately,

We remain, dear Madam,

faithfully yours,

HOOPER & MARCOSSON.

"H'm!" Jorum's jaw had squared. "Them sharps are takin' risks in hope of cutting down the World's Wonder Show. Well, Mr. Riegelmann, you can tell your good lady that I offer equal with Hooper and Marcossion for the option."

"I think," said Otto cunningly, "that if you only offer equal, Chorchina will feel she ought to accept the first that made her such a handsome testimonial."

Jorum swallowed an ejaculation in his baggy pouch that did not sound like a Biblical text.

"See here, Mr. Riegelmann, I'll offer \$10,000 for the option, but if I'm to take it up it's gotta be worth it. If you and your wife have played me for a sucker, you'll regret it all your professional days. Now, let's have chapter and verse. I reckon you've eaten far enough into my morning, don't you?"

"The cheque first, Mr. Jorum, *nicht wahr?*"

"Wa'al, of all the impudent boobs —" Jorum with em-purpled cheeks struck a violent blow with his fist on the desk. As he did so the telephone whirled and he snapped it off the hook. "Yep? *Who?*" His expression changed. "Why, shoot her right up now, Maddison!" He laid down the instrument and turned with a wide grin to Riegelmann. "Ain't that lucky, Mr. Riegelmann. It's your wife, at this very moment on the fast elevator. Now, perhaps we'll have the explanation."

"Chorchina?" Otto turned grey in the face and jumped out of his chair. "Then I don't think I'll wait —"

"Sit down, sir!" roared Jorum. "I mean to get to the bottom of this. If you came here on the square, what are you getting so flustered about?" Otto stammered, looked wildly round the room, and collapsed on to the chair again, biting the brim of his hat with a hunted look.

The page thumped against the door and burst in yelling like an Indian brave. "Mrs. Riegelmann!"

Georgy entered in a broad-brimmed black felt hat and a dark fur-lined overcoat, followed by Pansy with her hands in a tiny grey squirrel muff and a little cap of the same fur on her curls. Jorum rose bowing, and there was a moment's embarrassed silence, during which the child's great, dark eyes travelled with a curious intentness from one parent to the other.

Otto at length tried to pull himself together. He gave a violent shrug of his round shoulders. "My dear Chorchel!" — he expostulated, "you ought not to be out, you really ought not. What haf I told you, and the doctor? Here haf I been preparing the way for you with Mr. Jorum. You need not haf been anxious. It is all arranged on excellent terms, *nicht wahr*, Mr. Jorum?"

Jorum was grimly silent. Georgy stood looking at her husband with a face like steel. In the harsh, bluish light that poured coldly through the uncurtained windows, the ridge of her cheekbones and the shadowy hollows beneath were sharply defined. Two lines curved downwards like knife cuts from the corners of her mouth; it was a face of middle age, belied only by her lithe, impetuous carriage.

"Well," said Otto, at length, as no one spoke, "as you haf come,

I will leaf you now to complete the business yourself. I haf done my little bit," he laughed noisily, "and I am sure you and Mr. Jorum will make a fery good bargain together alone."

"Wait a minute!" said Georgy, covering the door. She looked across to Jorum still standing behind his desk. "Have you paid Mr. Riegelmann any ——" her voice faltered.

"Nope," said Jorum, "nothing has passed. You came in the nick of time, I guess, Mrs. Riegelmann."

Georgy, with an air of relief, moved away from the door. "Then, Otto, you can give me Hooper and Marcossou's letter."

"I have it here," interposed Jorum.

"Then, that is all right." Otto plunged for the door. Georgy stopped him. "I'll have those plans and measurements too, please." Otto glowered at her, his moustaches bristling like the whiskers of a spiteful cat. But he jerked out his pocketbook and disentangled a folded bunch of papers that left it thin and limp.

"Now you can go," said Georgy. "Pansy, stop here!"

The child had made a dart to follow her father; and now returned, the delicate corners of her mouth pouting, to the window seat, on which she perched herself, swinging a tiny Russian boot against the wainscoting.

"Well, now," Jorum reassumed his geniality. "Let's sit down and talk this matter over comfortably." He pulled up a leather armchair with ceremony for Georgina. "Pansy, my love!" he said, pausing a moment, "I don't want you to coax them stenographer ladies from their work; but they usually have not less'n a couple of pounds of candy between them; and Miss Isaacs she's always telling me if she could only make sure of the stork's bringing a little gal as nice as you, she'd give up all the world holds dear and marry him. Run along and visit 'em, won't you?"

"Thank you, Mr. Jorum." Pansy walked sedately across the polished floor and disappeared through the glass door into the secretaries' room.

"Well, if she ain't an old-fashioned kid!" mused Jorum for an instant. Then, squaring his elbows on the desk, he leaned towards Georgy, with his small eyes gleaming. "Now, Mrs. Riegelmann, may we have it?"

"I don't know," began Georgy, a little hesitant, "what my hus-

band has said to you. I see he showed you Hooper and Marcossion's letter. That's genuine enough."

"Ondoubtedly, the sharks!"

"I can't guess how they got wind of what I was doing at Gerry's."

"I can," murmured Jorum.

"But, of course, after the time I've been with you, Mr. Jorum, I had no idea but to come straight to you with my new act—I honestly believe it's my best—without haggling over the option."

"That was good of you, real good of you, marm." Jorum seemed genuinely touched.

"I call it," said Georgy deliberately, "THE DEVIL'S GAP. The idea came to me one night last summer—I sha'n't forget it—looking from the train when we were crossing a suspension bridge over a torrent. It's Patrico's biggest jump of his career, in spite of his age; as Aldebaran he never equalled it. I'm not much of a record hunter, Mr. Jorum, but I doubt if such a jump has ever been made in a circus."

"Go on, marm." Jorum was listening intently but noncommittally.

"Of course you can't judge it, until you have seen it——"

"Most natcherally not."

"But if you'll drive out to Gerry's to-morrow, you may see it. I'm keeping Patrico at regular practice with it, twice every day, till it becomes second nature with him."

"You may count on my being there, Mrs. Riegelmann, at the time you please to appoint."

"Meanwhile," Georgy unfolded the wad of papers Otto had left behind, "here are some diagrams and sketches that will give you a better idea. I'd like you to study them, right now, because I've been working with platforms that give the essentials of the trick only. I count on your carpenters to make the proper scenery."

Jorum smoothed out the papers on his desk and examined them with growing concentration. Some were simple skeleton plans with figures of heights attached; others were rude sketches of mountain peaks with waterfalls plunging between. Jorum com-



pared two measurements and looked up at Georgy in amazement. "You can't mean this seriously, marm?"

"Do I often bluff, Mr. Jorum?"

"Never, to my knowing." He held up one of the sketches and peered at it; then put his podgy finger again on a diagram. Presently, he raised his head and looked at her with the twinkle behind the gold-rimmed glasses that she knew meant the kindling of his enthusiasm. "Guess we'll have Saffelli in to this committee, marm," he said, lifting the telephone.

Saffelli sauntered in and saluted Georgy with a sulky look on his lank yellow face. He had always detested her for her successes. "Give a look at that, Umberto," said Jorum, pushing the papers across to him, his eyes still dancing with excitement. Saffelli looked surprised; but, quick to appreciate his Chief's moods, he examined the diagrams with close care. "Eet is impossible," he pronounced at last.

"But this lady assures me she does it twice a day, Umberto!"

"No horse," asserted Saffelli dogmatically, "could jump thus far."

"Not Aldebaran, Mr. Umberto?"

"Have you got Aldebaran?" The Italian shot a jealous glance at her.

"He has been working with you for five years under the name Patrico. I am surprised, with your ring experience, you never recognised him, Mr. Umberto."

"Fact, Mr. Saffelli," said Jorum, his eyes goggling with malice at the discomfiture of his opinionated assistant.

Saffelli turned green in his envy and flung down the plans upon the desk. "Well," he said grudgingly, "I will admit, if you like, that a horse like Aldebaran, if you really have him and have not been deceived, might make this jump once perhaps, twice perhaps: but night after night, securely, without risk of accident—eet is not possible. No horse is so to be trusted; even at a small jump he will refuse or fall sometimes. How much more with a difficult, a terrifying jump like this! You are ambeetious, Madame. You are desirous to do better than all the world, oh! I know your character well—it is right and natural; we have all had these dreams; I,

too, when I was young and strong like you and not a poor blower of whistles with a weak leg—but eet will not do. You do not want a fatal accident, I suppose, Madame, nor you, either, Mr. Jorum. Eet is not good advertising."

Jorum swung a little to and fro in his swivel chair. He was clearly uneasy.

"It does look uncommon risky, that's a fact, Mrs. Riegelmann. I shouldn't like a smash, for my show's sake—and yours, of course." He picked up the biggest sketch again. "Looks to me from this that if your horse jumped short any night by only a foot or two, there would be a tarnation smash—sixty foot fall here, isn't it, on the plan?"

Georgy smiled confidently. "I'm not quite so reckless as you and Mr. Saffelli suppose, Mr. Jorum. I've thought of the risk of a short jump, and how unpleasant it would be—for your Show. But if you'll study the plan *with* the sketch, Mr. Jorum, you'll see that my idea is for the waterfall to gush out here just below the landing place through a hole in the rockwork. The water will conceal this lower, jutting platform, which sticks out a good eight foot. If Patrico jumps short—but he never does—we shall go down, not many feet, into the water and hit on the lower platform. That's no worse than what happens to jockeys and hunting folk any day."

"Then if you are going to make it a fake, an illusion," said Saffelli contemptuously; "there is nothing in it, no danger, no art; you are just deluding the public."

"Oh, come now!" expostulated Jorum, "illusion, after all's the life of the show world. And I reckon that even with this explanation there's plenty risk, and art too, Umberto. Say she's giving that piebald devil a margin within which he may only break her legs, not her neck, if he fozzles; there's still a long enough journey over nothing, before he covers the safety platform even, to appal most performers I've met—yes, and to thrill any audience in these States or Urope out'n their durn skins. Mrs. Riegelmann, if you can do it, and I can't hardly believe yet it's possible, but we'll see to-morrow, I guess Jorum's is all out to make this the biggest sensation in circus history. I'll suffocate N'York with bills—we'll do a special fortnight at Harrison's Gardens (ring 'em up

at once, Saffelli, and pencil a date) before we go to the rubes. Then marm, I'll lay I'll make the States from Florida to Buffalo look like it's snowed paper for a month. Yep, and we'll make a raid across the undefended frontier and conquer Canada in the fall." He rose excitedly and began to toddle up and down the room on his little white-gaitered feet. "Gee! This is just what I wanted to put pep into me; one gets powerful stale at seventy-eight, Mrs. Riegelmann, marm, but, trust me, before I've finished this campaign, Admiral Popcorn's going to dwindle below his natcheral thirty inches to the height of a lead pencil alongside you; yes and the appeal of the Missing Link will drop to the patter of a dime museum, compared to your more powerful attractions. This shall be Jorum's comeback, and I'll do it with a punch that would make Carnera look like a used car ticket. . . . What's the matter, Saffelli, can't you hitch on to the Gardens nohow? Well, ring the Bills department while you're waiting, and tell 'em I want the Bosses of all sections to a conference here at three — and, say, do you think it would be worth a cable to that guy Epstein to know his rates for making an equestrian figger of my friend here, that could be cast in portable moulds and a specimen donated, sir, to ev'ry township we pass through that possesses a public park, for the perpetual enjoyment, recreation and instruction, Mr. Mayor, of young and old in this historic burg. . . . Miss Isaacs, come quick and take notes for a speech!"

The house telephone interrupted his expansion. He jerked the receiver impatiently off the hooks. "Yeah? . . . Who? Oh! Yes, I plumb forgot. . . . Yeah, he must come up. By appointment. Shoot him along. Saffelli, run draft that cable and then ring Mr. Van Noort of the *Circus World*; say Mr. Jorum has an exclusive for him, if he'll dine to-night at Luigi's, private room, with me. One moment, Mrs. Riegelmann, before you go! Will you buzz round to Mme. Coralie's without delay and have some more studio portraits made? We must refresh the mem'ry of this lazy metropolitan public a little."

As Georgy nodded, the page boy banged open the door. "Mr. Rixen!" he bawled, and Jorum pattered over to the threshold with hands outstretched. "Come right in, Joe," he babbled; "let me interdooce Madam Georgina Dufay, my star rider, who is go-

ing to astound you, Joe, yessir, and all the breathing critturs of God's wunnerful creation with her noo incredible Sensation Jump of Death. I am proud to bill in one sooperb programme this daring deefiance of the laws of equilibrium and your own troupe of world-wide repytation. I hope, sir, we will be this spring not only the grandest circus that has ever taken the road in this old country, but a mighty happy and yoonited family as well."

2

Aunt Nettie, a sun hat with black streamers on her head, and bearing a pail in one hand and in the other the grey speckled form of a turkey for plucking, came out upon the creepered verandah of the farmhouse and settled herself down to her task, affixing a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles to her lean nose. Below the lawn, edged with large earthenware pots over the rims of which autumn flowers trailed their deep colours, a broken slope ran away to the edge of the lake. It lay still in the windless September air, its vaporious, pale-green water dyed to gold and crimson near the banks, where the woods that leaned over its edge bathed the reflection of their brilliant foliage in its basin. Behind, above the dark crests of the spruce that clothed the lower slopes, Cone Hill rose with its rounded outlines. Focussed in a small mirror, the scene might have been a Japanese colour print with a miniature Fujiyama at its centre; and a troop of waterfowl, skimming suddenly out of the reeds on arrow-shaped wings, and seeking an islet clothed in feathery firs that smudged the shimmering oval of the lake, would have served to heighten the illusion.

But Misted Lake Farm is in Canada, where the wheatlands touch the ranches, half a day's run in a swift car to Winnipeg by the new motor road that to the left winds its grey ribbon past the shingled barns and outbuildings, past the whitewashed homestead, into the dip of the woods; and thence round the curve of the water across the wheat-growing plain to the smoke-blue horizon. The ranch is empty this morning; the stockyards with their split-rail fencings deserted, for all the hands are riding range; the house is asleep but for an occasional chink of dishes from the

kitchen where the young servant girl who assists Aunt Nettie with the cooking is washing up. The old lady plies her task with eyes bent upon the fowl, her wide lips pursed with attention. Once the pail grates on the doorstep as she pushes her foot accidentally against it, and the sound echoes down to the dreaming lake.

Suddenly she raises her head. There is a soft thunder of horse hoofs cantering over turf behind the house, dying away in the direction of the stockyards. Aunt Nettie takes off her spectacles and listens. Presently a spur jingles on the bare wooden floor of the passage inside the house, and she calls, "Darrell! I'm here!"

Darrell Carless comes out through the wooden porch, ducking his head to save his high, black Stetson. He wears plain leather chaps with a dark shirt and a red handkerchief round his neck.

"Any mail, Aunt Nettie?"

"A letter from the hospital. I thought you wouldn't mind my opening it."

"Naturally not. What does James say? Or what do they say for him?"

"Nothing too good, I'm afraid, Darrell. It's the matron that writes. They're none of them pleased at the way he doesn't recover strength. I'd have thought James the toughest man on his ranch."

"So would I, Aunt, until they opened him up at Winnipeg and found his inside all out of place. It wasn't the toss, nor even the steer's horn that laid him out so, Aunt Nettie. He must have been ailing for years, and carrying loads of pain he never told us!"

"The Carless men are good at carrying pain, I guess." Aunt Nettie stared out over the lake.

"Now, what do you mean by that, Aunt?" Darrell turned a shade deeper red beneath his sunburnt skin.

"Oh, nothing, I suppose." Aunt Nettie grinned, showing a long line of white teeth the length of her projecting jaws. "Just my nonsense, eh?" The old eyes peeped round the corners of her spectacles with an elfish suggestiveness. Then she sighed and held up the nearly plucked turkey to look at it. "But I guess I oughtn't to laugh on top of news like this. You can read the letter for yourself, inside the parlour. Darrell," she turned round and faced him with a keen glance beneath her wintry eyebrows, "do you

realise, boy, that your brother's going to peg out, this time?" "God forbid, Aunt Nettie! Why do you want to go looking ahead for disaster?"

"Because I feel it all over my old bones." She shrugged her thin shoulders. "And then, boy, it'll be up to you to run this old ranch."

"If James leaves it to me. But need we speculate in dead men's shoes this way? It's not like you, Aunt."

"You know your brother's willed it to you, Darrell. And what I want to say is, you ought to be thinking about settling down, if you want to make a success of it."

"Settle down? Do I gad about? I haven't even been to Winnipeg since Christmas last, except to visit poor old James in hospital."

"You know what I mean by settling down, boy. You'll need a housekeeper."

"Were you thinking of giving notice, then, Aunt Nettie?" A whimsical smile twisted the corner of his mouth.

The old woman suddenly caught at his leather-gauntleted arm and rubbed her chin with its straggling grey hairs affectionately against it.

"Don't you try to put me off, Darrell! I love you, boy. I'm old enough to say it without shame. You know I'll get notice soon from the Big Boss of all, and go to a home where, I'm afraid, if the Book's right, there'll be no use for a good plain cook nor any rooms to turn out. What'll I do, Darrell, with a crown — and a harp — I that can't abide strumming? Still, that's for the hereafter. What'll you do, Boss of Misted Lake Ranch, a young man, unmarried? Don't say you'll hire a Chinese cook; I'll thump against my coffin lid if you do. I always feel I can taste their yaller fingers in any dish they make; a Christian's food oughta be cooked by a Christian, not by a heathen idolater."

Darrell crouched down beside her on the doorstep. There was still laughter in his grave eyes.

"Come right out with what you're getting at, Aunt Nettie. You're not worrying over my future digestion all this lot."

"Well, then, I will — though you know already. You want a wife, and what's more —"



"Hey! Steady on, Aunt! That'll do for one gulp."

"I say, what's more, what's the matter with Winifred Beaudoin?"

"I want a wife, and what's the matter with Winifred Beaudoin. What *is* the matter with Winnie, then, Aunt Nettie?"

"Now, boy, don't you go pretending to misunderstand." She laid her creased, blue-mottled hand tenderly on his knee. "You needn't be modest — with me, you know."

Darrell pulled his hat off his grey-streaked, black head and swung it to and fro. "I needn't be modest, needn't I? By which I suppose I have to take it that in your opinion I've only to throw a rope over Winifred to corral her?"

"You know it, as well as I do, boy."

"You're flattering. But, if it were so, why should I?"

"Isn't she as nice-looking —?"

"As they make them out here. I grant it."

"And the proper age. And just the very wife for a man with your job."

"A town-bred girl, that's lived all her life in Quebec and then Winnipeg!"

"Town-bred she may be, which makes her all the sweeter-mannered to my thinking. But she's a gal of the wilds in her soul, if ever there was one. She looks forward to her holidays here all the rest of the year. If your brother forgot to invite her one time, I believe she'd die of the dismals. She rides a bronk, ropes a steer . . ."

"Plays the piano after supper, Aunt Nettie, while you go to sleep."

"Oh, get along with you, I've no patience!"

"Brings umpteen filmy evening frocks in her Saratoga even out to this wilderness. Ploughs with her own cheque book. . . . Aunt Nettie, am I a catch for an heiress?"

"If the heiress wants you, 'yes! It's working without capital that's pulled poor James down and worn out his tubings."

"Do you take me for a fortune hunter? What'd Colonel Beaudoin think if I carried off his lamb?"

"Thank God his daughter'd not been snicked up by a lounge lizard with a taste for Charlestoning."

Darrell laughed and stood up. "You're too clever for me, Aunt Nettie. But it's all nonsense and you know it."

"Why do I know it, Darrell?"

"Because I've not the slightest intention of marrying — now or ever."

"Oh, Darrell, boy, don't say that!" She looked up in piteous alarm at the gravity of his tone.

"Just as well you should know it, Aunt Nettie, and save yourself needless worrying."

"But why, Darrell, why?"

"I missed the 'bus, as they say over there."

"When? How? Of course, I knew it was something of that kind, Darrell, but how did it happen? Tell me. Was it when you were trailing round in your circus — a thing no Carless ought ever to have let himself come to, boy?"

"The circus isn't an unclean trade, believe me, Aunt."

"Why did it go wrong?"

"She thought she ought to remember she was a married woman already."

Aunt Nettie gasped. "Then it *don't* seem to me a clean place, after all, your circus. The cool way you say it, too!"

"Sorry if I shocked you, my dear. But you get your ideas pulled out a bit when you travel."

"Then home, sweet home, for me. Seems to me you ran up against an honest woman than you deserved to find, young man. And seeing that's all dead and gone, I say again what's the matter with —"

Darrell interrupted. "Aunt Nettie, when I go in to see James to-morrow in the car, I'll bring you back something for your room, one of those china candlesticks —"

"You want to put me off the subject, Darrell."

"Do I?"

"Well, why start talking all of a jump like that about my room and chinee candlesticks?"

"It just came into my mind, and I thought you'd care for one of them, maybe."

"Well, it's very sweet of you, boy, but I don't need it, thank you."

"Get you one like those in Marson's catalogue, with red roses trailing all up the stem."

"It wouldn't please me, not one little bit."

"That's queer, Aunt."

"Not if you knew. Don't you remember, when first you came out here to join us six years back, I had a lovely one, a chiney parrot, all green and red with a yaller crest, holding the candle in his claw, like this?"

"I remember that fowl as if it was yesterday, and how you cried when the hired girl broke it."

"Well, you thought I was a silly old woman, no doubt, but that parrot, Leopold I used to call him, just to myself, for a joke, was a sort of a little friend to me. I used to say, 'Good-night, Leopold!' every night before blowing the candle out."

"Well, would you like one, a little dwarf with a pointed cap and a white beard and a spade?"

"No, Darrell, I wouldn't, honestly. It might be all well enough and very pretty for some one starting to furnish on their own. But when you've had the best, Darrell, you can't start again, so to speak, and begin to take an interest in the second-class. If I'd had the Dwarf first and lost him, and then some one had showed me Leopold, it would have been different. But *after* Leopold . . . no, I don't seem able to bite on it, somehow."

Darrell's arm went round her neck. "Didn't I know you'd say that? And now please, you try to understand me. Winifred Beau-doin may be the best and prettiest girl in Canada at this moment; she most likely is. If I'd met her first . . . then, perhaps. But, as you say, you can't start again and begin to take an interest in the second-class. Oh, I'd do it, right enough, if I could, Aunt Nettie. The love-blighted existence is all very picturesque in the talkies, but it's a poisonous thing in reality. It's a blasphemy against life, according to my way of seeing things. If you suppose I don't want a wife, don't want children . . . well, you don't know me, that's all. But I just can't. At every turn it would be the comparison I couldn't keep out of my mind. And that wouldn't be fair, would it, to Winifred or any one else in the same place?"

Aunt Nettie sighed as she picked up the turkey and the pail.

"Any other mail?" enquired Darrell, as she turned to go indoors.

"Not a thing, except about the circus."

"What circus? What about it?"

"Oh, just a circular announcing Jorum's Circus at Winnipeg, week after next. I didn't read it. I'm too stiff to go gallivanting off in cars nowadays and getting home at three in the morning for any show. But I s'pose it'll excite you. You chase round after every circus that comes near. Why don't you go in and see it? . . . Pick up Winifred in town and take her for a treat."

"Throw me the bill out of the window, then, as you go in."

The old maid passed into the shadow of the porch with her black ribbons dangling. The next moment a rainbow-coloured leaflet fluttered out of the parlour window onto a flower bed. Darrell stooped to pick it up and stood turning over the pages listlessly. Suddenly his head went forward with a jerk and he stood still, staring at some big black letters curving across a blood-red double page. Aunt Nettie looked out of her bedroom window above.

"What do you think of it? Worth the journey?"

"I think — perhaps — I'll go and see it," said Darrell slowly, keeping his face turned from her as he rolled and unrolled the gaudy booklet in his long, square-tipped fingers.

"Are you going to take Winifred for company?"

"No, I think this time, if I go, I'll go . . . just all alone."

3

But for quite a while on the Monday afternoon a fortnight later, Darrell stood hesitating on the pavement opposite the façade of Jorum's in Winnipeg, watching the last afternoon visitors stream out and the first evening ones drift in, while the sky grew purple over the canvas dome and the surrounding roofs. Dusk fell on the noisy, hooting street; lights began to sizzle on the overhead standards and to flash from the speeding cars, and a cold wind blew up from the riverside. He stood with eyes fixed on the great poster over the entrance that showed a tall figure in red tights, with a cock's feather trailing back from a scarlet skullcap, leaping

a piebald horse from the Gothic arch of a broken bridge across a waterfall to another shattered arch beyond.

### GEORGINA DUFAY in THE DEVIL'S GAP!

ran the fiery lettering over the picture, curling up from a torch held by the Mephistopheles who flanked one side of the poster, while a skeleton beat the Drum of Death at the other.

"But that's not Georgy," murmured Darrell, as he took an irresolute turn down the street away from the show; and indeed, the white face of the leaper, with its black arched eyebrows, might have been any one or no one.

The pavement ended at a crossing where a policeman controlled a darting stream of cars with glaring headlights. Checked for a moment on the corner, Carless irresolutely drifted back again to the outside of the circus. There he stood, with his eyes lifted again to the poster, trying to recall the face and form of the Georgina he knew. But though that figure had been his phantom companion, waking and dreaming, for five years on the range, flitting beside his pony as he galloped over the billows of the prairie, gazing at him from the crags of the hills, when he wound his way through Horsehoof Cleft to the further feeding grounds on the other side of the ranch, piercing the misty surface of the lake when he sought to fish from the dinghy; although it had haunted him first with fierce cruelty, then in the dull emptiness of his soul, latterly with a kind of reluctant sweetness, like the strains of a half-forgotten childhood's song, yet now, when he sought to recall it, to reply to the libel of the face on the poster, it eluded his imagination. Each time instead he saw some scene of the day that was just passing — his brother James' face with half-closed eyes on the pillow, its dark beard and moustaches motionless as if carved, but the subtle humour and good-natured shrewdness of the business man who had made the tiny Misted Lake Farm into the great Misted Lake Ranch by his own efforts, still penetrating the mask of pain and exhaustion; or else the shining city offices of the Bellingham Canned Beef Trust and old Josh Bellingham grinning through his white moustache and signing with podgy fingers the big cheque he now carried in his pocket-book; or Winifred Beaudoin's pale, highly strung face with the

piquant snub nose and large glamorous eyes beneath a tight black helmet-toque, as she stopped her car suddenly to hail him on Main Street. He could remember his present life in sharp outline, but the past he was striving to recall seemed cloaked in pale mist. But he must not be thus robbed, he cried desperately to himself. He must renew his image, if it were really failing him, no matter what the pain; and abruptly he found himself in the glare of the circus entrance, throwing down his coin and pressing forward with a number of others into the well-remembered smell of the menagerie.

For a moment Darrell shut his eyes and let the past flow back over him, as quickly it did in the smell of sawdust and wild beasts, mingled with orange peel. Then he opened his eyes again and gazed round upon the familiar shapes of yawning lions, huddled in high-shouldered poses behind bars; monkeys bounding from the wires of their cage to the tree in the centre and back again like brown balls; the speckled splendour of a sleeping leopard, lying tumbled like some precious rug; the glistening black form of a sea lion twisting in its tank of soapy-looking water.

It was an hour before the circus was billed to begin, and Darrell wandered on, steeped in memories, to a pen of animal freaks: a calf with four feeble little extra legs hanging from its body beside the four on which it stood; a wretched, somnolent dog with a second sightless head drooping beside the live one that twitched in a continuous palsy; an albino horse with pink eyes and another with an immense plaited mane that swept the ground; a dwarf bull, complete in every part, perched on a barrel with a showman stroking it. Darrell turned away with a feeling that most of these monstrosities should have been destroyed at birth (though, as he recalled, he had been used to look at them with a professional interest in his own circus days) and soon found himself pressed in a throng that was gaping at human freaks ranged along a red-carpeted platform by the wall. An armless man with flat bosses to the sleeves of his evening jacket manipulated coloured chalks with toes clad in divided white cotton socks. A woman with scanty hair in a knob and a growth of stiff bluish beard sat in a glittering evening dress. A pallid Russian giantess let her blockish feet rest at the foot of the platform on a level with the spectators and



roguishly reminded the men who passed that she was still unmarried; while a cadaverous form in black tights (billed as a living skeleton) grinned behind her shoulder. A white kaffir, clearly half-imbecile, blinked with weak eyes at the glaring electrics and worked his thick lips; the Fat Woman in sleeveless tunic, short spangled skirt and lace-up half-boots displayed her diseased, pink-blotched flesh with stolid indifference. A larger crowd pressed round a man in Hungarian Hussar uniform from the midst of whose body protruded the trunk and limbs of a second, childlike figure clad in white silk stockings and satin knee breeches. The moss-haired girl with her matted green halo and chalky face sold picture postcards of herself; and next to the India-rubber man who pulled out to a foot's length the skin of his pendulous cheeks, a sword-swallower with businesslike despatch dropped jagged blades and bayonets into his upward-tilted mouth.

Down the centre of this hall ran a line of plush velvet tents, gilt-fringed and tasselled. In one of them was to be seen "The Smallest Bible on Earth" ( $1\frac{1}{2} \times 2$  in.). In another, the "Automaton Chess Player. Challenges all living exponents of the game." In a third, *Cinderella and the Crystal Coach and Slipper*, acted by performing fleas. In a fourth the World's Largest Sardine, two foot from mouth to tail, caught in the harbour of Cagliari. Swinging on boards from the roof, or curving along the slopes of the canvas where it ran up to meet the tent poles were the coloured posters of the Great Three Ring Circus — horses walking on their hind legs, dogs wearing suits of human clothes, chimpanzees drinking from champagne glasses, elephants playing violoncellos, men shot from giant cannon, yelling clowns with white, black, blue and crimson-streaked faces that mocked the human countenance. "Beats all records!" cried the bills. "Cannot be believed, when seen!" "Brought over countless miles from the Sahara Desert!" Suddenly Darrell, as he gazed round, seemed to enter into the mind that had created this phantasmagoria; he recoiled from the puerile curiosity, the itch for the unnatural and the topsyturvy, the half-vacuous grin of the showman boasting, "You h'ain't seen *that* before!" He was sickened by the unreality of it all; even the attendants moving about with their tired, deeply cut features seemed not to belong to the normal world.

"To think that I was once a showman too," he reflected, "and that she's a show-woman still. How can she stick it?" And the vision of Misted Lake floated before him, with the torturing dream of Georgina, her face bare of paint and artificial eyebrows, lying back in the boat he rowed towards the vapour-wreathed island, the breeze lifting her short yellow curls . . . yes, he could see her plainly enough now, too plainly.

He plunged forward to escape the picture and entered what was called "The Hall of Fine Art, Sculpture and Waxwork Congress of Monarchs and Statesmen." Here Jorum, as it were, contemptuously threw in the real world for an encore number to his own more remarkable universe. Along a lofty dais in the centre the enthroned kings and their ministers grouped round carved tables with quill pens in their nerveless hands; stood or sat with tottering dignity, diffusing the faint sickly smell of wax and exhibiting the embarrassing listening air of their kind. Crystal chandeliers, piercing the painted canvas ceiling, which was intended to give the illusion of a frescoed palace, shone on rows of historical pictures in gilt frames, lurid battle-pieces, meetings of conquerors, staring portraits of celebrities. Beneath them, and grouped in clusters about the room between the palms and laurels in pots wrapped round with crinkled red paper, were yellowish moulds of famous sculptures, the Laocöon, Venus of Milo, Apollo Belvidere, Joan of Arc in armour, Watts' drunken horseman of the "Physical Energy" monument. The frieze of the Parthenon made a dado, and fragments of bas-relief were hung in the gaps between the oil paintings.

As Darrell edged his way along the cord that kept the crowd from the exhibits, trying to identify the pictures from the vaguely remembered history lessons of his schooldays, he was brought up with a hot throb of his heart by a piece of sculpture. "Amazon of Epidaurus," read the ivory label underneath it. It was the figure of a headless girl riding a headless charger. But the poise of the body balancing the rearing horse, the set of the broad shoulders tapering down to the supple waist, the grip of the thighs on the horse's flanks might have been modelled from Georgina. Every detail, as he had hungrily watched it from the ringside so many nights under the glare of the arc lights, so many days in the drab

gloom of rehearsals, stood out aching in his memory to be compared with the stone fragment before him. In a kind of daze he wondered if the figure could actually have been modelled from Georgy; he could not understand the inscription below it. But it must be very old to be so damaged—they would not, surely, show a new figure that had been injured. Yet a sculptor had modelled Georgy once, he knew. He peered again at the label. "C.375 B. C." he now read on it. Then it was old, very old, and he was just being hallucinated. But such a likeness seemed incredible. And as he stood wondering, a fanfare of trumpets and a sound of loud-voiced shouting by announcers out beyond the Freaks' Hall, warned him that the circus was about to begin.

4

"Make a cup of tea for yourself, Madame Panzetti, if you'd care for one, but not for us," said Georgy, entering her dressing room (which was part of a long shed at the back of the disused factory yard where Jorum had pitched his show tents) with Pansy hopping at her side. "We've had our tea already at the Royal Alec, for a treat."

Madame Panzetti, the dresser, an old trapeze artist who still retained her trim, athletic-looking figure in spite of the disappearance of her hair and the wrinkles that buried her mouth, paused in the act of lifting the kettle from the oil-stove. "Miss Pansee would like another cup, I am sure," she hinted, her tiny black eyes twinkling.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Panzetti," pleaded Pansy, skipping over to the stove. "Make it strong for me, please, and four lumps of sugar."

"Pansy, you're a greedy little pig," laughed her mother, pulling off her coat and hanging it on a peg, "and you know strong tea's bad for you. Don't give her so much sugar, Madame."

Pansy laughed and tucked herself away on a box in the corner, stirring her tea. "Hullo, Pussy!" she cried suddenly, as an ugly kitten with a black smudge on its white mouth, appeared from nowhere and rubbed itself along the box. "Meow!" said Pansy with a little grimace, answering the plaint of the creature, and, bending forward, shook over her long black curls for the cat to

play with. The kitten reared on its hind legs and snatched at them excitedly. "Mrs. Panzetti," said Pansy at length, looking up with a rosy flush, "can't you spare just a little drop of milk for Kitty in my saucer; look!"

"Come over here, then, *ragazza*," said the old woman with a gesture of mock exasperation. "Oh! Look, I've filled it too full: be careful not to spill it on your mother's lovely rug, Meess!"

As Pansy stepped carefully across the rug, holding the brimming saucer tight in both hands, and then sank on to one knee, without spilling a drop, to place it before the hungry mite, Georgy and the old Italian could not help exchanging looks of admiration. "*Bellissima!*" murmured Madame Panzetti.

"Yes, she's a fairy!" assented Georgy, with an affectation of casualness, opening one or two envelopes lying on her dressing table. She looked up. "Come and hug your mother," she commanded. "Oh! Don't squeeze so tight, Pansy, you're strangling me."

Madame Panzetti exclaimed, "If I didn't forget now! Meester Rixen 'ee has called."

Georgy looked up with a frown. "Mr. Rixen? What for?"

"He want to see you. He will come again at six."

Georgy looked at her wrist watch. "It's about that now. I suppose I must see him."

Her relations with Joe Rixen during this tour had been unexpected. After her first performance of the Devil's Gap, amid the prodigious tumult of acclamation before and behind the curtains, he had stolen up and congratulated her with a fervour in his yellow eye that, with all her hatred of him, she could not but feel to be sincere. "A great act, Georgy!" he had croaked. "I always told you you would knock all other women's acts out one day, didn't I? This time, I'm damned if you haven't done it!" The vulturine eye gleamed. "Flirting with destruction, I call it!" He licked his lips. "It's like hugging Death, ain't it? You can feel the cold breath of her shaking all down your spine — can't you? — and see yourself lying in a little red heap all the way down there at the bottom, Patrico atop of you with his spine cracked and your brains scattered by his last kick. And yet all the while you're prancing round the track, collecting the cheers. It's those feelings that make it worth while, ain't it?" He laughed

a crackling internal laugh and held out his lank, spidery hand. "Let by-gones be by-gones to-night, Georgy, and shake!"

Radiant as she was with her triumph, Georgy could not do that. She remembered her father's ruin, the poisoning of Darrell's horse, the lunatic malignity of the acrobat's face in the ring of the Cirque d'Or when he had made Patrico throw her; and she turned away with some muttered, half-polite reply. It seemed to her nevertheless that Rixen was somehow less formidable. His white hair, the sculpture of advancing age on his face, bringing out the dignified ridge of his nose and the subtlety of the long sensitive mouth, had improved him; he seemed even to dress in a quieter and more normal style. And yet he was mad; she was sure of it. Would any one doing an act like hers deliberately unstring herself by such imaginations as he had described? Luckily she had never in her life expected a fall or any other accident, which had made them less terrible when they came. Yet at the second performance, when she had sat waiting on Patrico's back at the top of the pinnacle, before beginning the gallop down the mountain slope to the broken bridge, she had remembered his talk and felt a moment's distinct thrill of fear as she glanced down at the shrunken brown arena far away below.

After that she had tried to avoid Rixen; her old idea of seeking evidence to convict him of Robertshaw's murder had lost its urgency now that her father had disappeared, it seemed, finally, yet she still could not bring herself to forgive the pantomimist. But here her intentions were thwarted by her husband's persistence in Rixen's friendship. The two became inseparable, as they had been formerly in Paris; they were always playing cards together or resorting to gambling hells known to Rixen in the various cities they passed through during the tour. Several times Georgy — loyal to her resolve not to let her husband be exposed — had to meet sudden demands by Otto to pay card debts due to the pantomimist, and once or twice Rixen with unusual courtesy gave time till next salary day for the debt to be paid. After that she could not refuse her husband's insistence that she should offer civilities to Rixen, take him with them to dine at restaurants, invite him to drinks and cards in their lodgings.

Then had come another shock — on the occasion of a painful but relatively slight mishap which had got into the Minneapolis papers, as it had prevented her doing the Devil's Gap for a few performances. At the end of her earlier *haute école* number on Ruy Blas, as she was riding out of the arena, an awkward substitute acting in one of the limelight nests had shot a sudden crimson ray by mistake through the entrance curtains, instead of focussing on Number 1 ring. Ruy Blas, always a nervy horse, had shied violently as the unexpected light fell on him, and had brought Georgy's head with a crash against a projecting iron bar at the top of a section of caging for a lion act. The impact crushed her silk top hat, which was luckily a safety one made by a hunting tailor and broke some of the force of the blow. But the iron burst the skin of her forehead and as she reeled back, half-stunned, she felt a hot stream blinding her. An arm shot out from below and propped her up before she could slide out of the saddle, and the grooms ran to help her down. When the blood was wiped out of her eyes, she found herself on the ground supported by a long white arm, streaked with red from her wound. Then the face of Joe Rixen, made up for Pierrot in the sketch he was about to play with his troupe, came round, anxiously peering below its black skull cap into hers. It was he who had broken her fall, and she was soon able to thank him and to go home with a bandaged head.

After the performance, Rixen came round to her lodgings with Otto to enquire. As the doctor had diagnosed the wound as little but a deep scratch, the two men made merry over her escape. Champagne was procured by Rixen and opened over supper, and then the cards were brought out. Otto urged Georgy to go to bed; but she preferred to lie on the sofa, hoping that her presence would induce Rixen to leave early and not persuade her husband to gamble all night.

Presently she dropped into a doze; to be awakened by a tug at her head. She opened her eyes, and saw her husband snoring in the armchair by the fireside. Rixen was bending over her, his one eye glittering wildly and his mobile lips twitching. He was muttering, and at first in her dizzy state she could not make out what he was saying. But presently she felt him pulling at the



bandage on her forehead and whispering shrilly, "Let me kiss your wound! Let me drink those red drops! I must, damn you! You madden me, you witch! Lovely, hurt witch!" She felt his other hand clutching at her bosom; she could not raise herself under the weight, but with a jerk of her elbow contrived to upset a small table beside the couch, on which a glass of sol volatile and water had been placed for her.

It fell with a noisy crash, and Otto leapt to his feet, crying out in terror. He gazed round wildly, and then his eyes fell on Rixen, crouched by the sofa with the bloodstained bandage torn off in his hand. She saw the shallow blue-china ovals of Otto's eyes narrow with jealous divination and for a moment thought the men would grapple. But Rixen, with an eel-like wriggle, found his feet and croaked out, "Time you woke, Riegelmann! Here's the Missus delirious, shouting in her sleep and pulling her bandage off. Look after her, call for her woman, damme, can't you? Mrs. Riegelmann, keep calm; it's all right; you've been dreaming, that's all. I'll leave you, old man. Put her to bed as quick as you can. That's the best thing for her." He was flapping himself into his overcoat with violent speed, and his white hand snatched his hat from its peg as he spoke. "I'll call and enquire in the morning," he said, leering round the door, and went padding away down the staircase, his step like the tap of a sheet of wind-blown paper.

But the next day Otto and Rixen came in arm-in-arm together; the pantomimist enquired respectfully after her wound and almost convinced her against all her knowledge that he was a fatherly old gentleman and that she had dreamed his behaviour of last night in delirium, as he had said. Otto clung closer to him than ever, and, bound to her self-appointed task of keeping her husband and her daughter with her as one household, at any rate in outward appearance, she decided to bear Rixen with patience, but to be on the watch against his outbreaks of lunacy.

Therefore, when at six his tap fell on her door, she called to him to come in without sign of displeasure; but was surprised to see him accompanied by his cousin, Seth Rixen, a bulldog man with small, malicious eyes and a face red and pimpled with drinking.

"Sorry to have to trouble you this way, Georgy," began Joe with an almost parsonic air of gravity. "We've a rather unpleasant duty to carry out, eh, Seth?" Seth growled and fixed a hostile black pin point on Georgy, "and the sooner we get it over the better."

Georgina glanced at them apprehensively; she knew what this sort of exordium generally portended. "Madame Panzetti, take Pansy along with you, there's a dear," she began; but Seth growled and put out a hand to detain Pansy, who, on the entrance of the pantomimists, had dropped the cat, along whose back she was slowly rubbing her shapely chin and had turned a little pale.

"The nipper stays!" he snarled.

"Yes, Seth, that's right," said Joe, as if soothing his cousin down. "We shall want the little girl. Pansy, my love, go back and sit on your little seat again, won't you?"

The child turned greenish; her pencilled eyebrows stood out against her pallor; her lips parted and stayed open. She might have been a little wax figure.

"What's the matter, my darling?" cried her mother, distressed at her changed look.

"I want to go," shrilled Pansy in a sobbing tone. "I feel sick."

"Well, run into the back room, dear, to the washstand. I'll come to you in a second."

"None of those tricks," interrupted Seth Rixen, "we mean to have an explanation and we want her here."

Pansy uttered a wail and began to cry. Georgy turned furiously on Joe's cousin. "How dare you talk to my little girl like that, Mr. Seth Rixen? I'll send you out of my room in another minute."

"Better not," snorted Seth: "better hear what we've got to say fust, eh, Joe?"

"Yes, I think, you must listen to us first, Mrs. Riegelmann," said Joe in the same parsonic voice, but with his eye dancing at the back of his artificial woe. "Shall I do the patter, Seth?"

"Yes, only get on with it, for Gawd's sake. Is that old cow gone yet?" Madame Panzetti's face disappeared round the door. "Well, then, Georgy, — Mrs. Riegelmann," said Joe, "I'm sorry to have

to tell you that your husband has been losing very heavily to me at *faro* lately."

Georgy sighed. "I'm getting used to that, Mr. Rixen. You needn't bring your cousin and terrify the child here to prove that. What of it? We've always paid you — in time — haven't we?"

"I only wish that was all there was to it this time, Georgy," said Joe feelingly. "I wouldn't be a pressing creditor, as you know. But this business is unfortunately worse. It's more than we think we ought to put up with. Eh, Seth?"

"A damned heap more," assented his cousin.

"Your husband, Georgy, it breaks my heart to tell you, has robbed us."

"That's a lie, Rixen!"

"I almost wish I could be rightly called a liar, to get you and Otto out of this mess, Georgy. But it's no good. Seth and I have proofs. Both our pocketbooks were stripped bare in our dressing room during this afternoon's show."

"You don't leave money lying about loose in your dressing room."

"We oughtn't to. I shall never forgive myself for putting temptation in people's way, as I see I did. We should have locked the door, anyway. But I've been too trustful. So's Seth, haven't you?"

"Bloody fool in this thieves' kitchen, if you ask me."

"But, very luckily, when we have a big roll of notes, we always take the precaution of marking down their numbers."

Georgy stared at him incredulously. She felt sure some trap had been laid.

"We went straight round to your husband in Branting's Café, took him aside and tackled him. When he saw it was no use, he broke down and confessed; we found the notes we had numbered on him."

"Stop a bit!" interrupted Georgy. "You say you went to my husband as soon as you found you had been robbed. Why to him? What made you suspect *him*?"

"Oh, it wasn't a suspicion, Georgy; it was a cert. You see, my cousin saw the theft committed."

"Saw my husband take the notes?"

"No; not your husband, Georgy, your daughter!"

Georgina wheeled round aghast towards Pansy. The child was crouched on top of the box in the corner; her eyes glaring in terror, her cheeks stained with tears, gulping dry sobs, and putting up one little arm before her face as if to ward off a blow. In a moment her mother had her arms round her, and was passionately kissing her black curls. "Don't, my poor darling," she murmured to her, "don't, my Pansy. It's all a mistake. No one's going to hurt you, little thing."

"That depends," broke in Seth roughly. "And as for mistakes, mistakes be damned! I heard her creeping about the room when I came down the passage, first off after our number, while the rest were finishing. I looked through a chink in the boards and saw her fumbling in our pockets. Then I must 'a made some sound, for she nips into our big empty clothes hamper quick as a flea hopping. She knows all about our stuff, since Joe here took to having her in and out of our place to pet her. Her dodge was to get out the same way after we had changed and gone out again. So I went back and told Joe here, and we reckoned we'd let her carry it through according to programme, shadow her and find which of you two had put her on. The trail led to your husband, as we've said; so after giving the kid a minute to get away from the café we went in and found him with the boodle. Now, what about it, Missis?"

"Pansy," said Georgina, "this isn't any of it true, is it?"

"Yes," said Pansy in a little strangled voice, "all true. I was in the basket. He told me to do it. Said there'd be no trouble, and he'd give me a little hat. Dad said I needn't worry. If he told me to do it, there was no harm in it." She began to sob gently again.

"Well, it's a bad business, Georgy, isn't it?" insisted Joe. "I don't feel I can have much sympathy for Otto after this, such a false friend! If it was only him that was for it, I'd have been round to O'Ferrall, the circus bull, and had him arrested, straight away. But then there's the kid; we've always got to remember that. She'd be in for some years at the reformatory, I know, if it was proved against her. Poor kid!"

"Rope's end I'd give her to start with," growled Seth.

"Well," Joe went on, "we've talked it over, Seth and I, and he says he'll leave me to arrange it, eh, Seth?"

"On terms, you know, Joe," said Seth with a warning nod.

"Yes, that's agreed between us two. Now, Seth, as you've given your evidence, will you leave me with Mrs. Riegelmann a bit? And Pansy, my love, if you go and look for nice Madame Panzetti, your mother'll send for you when she wants you."

"Yes, Pansy," said Georgy dully, "you find Madame." The child fled from the compartment.

"Now, Georgy," said Joe, when they were alone. "Aren't your eyes opened at last? What's the good of you sticking to this flabby-hearted crook when there's a man that loves you and would make you happier than you've ever known the meaning of?"

Georgy looked at him, bewildered. It was as if she heard a cracked gramophone record repeating something beautiful she had heard years ago.

"A man?" she stammered. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, come, you know. I've always been crazy about you. 'Member that night in the Waxwork? I was a bit rough, I know. And the other evening, when I saw you stretched out so lovely on that couch, with the red drops trickling across your white skin! I forgot myself; some things excite me. But, Lord, what's a man without a bit of temperament? You're a warm woman, Georgy; in your heart of hearts you don't think any worse of me for being a scorcher, I know. A bit of pain in your pleasure, it's the bitters in the cocktail, ain't it? I'll teach you to enjoy it, same as I do. Leave that dog's-meat sausage of a man and come with me, next week when the tour ends. We'll slip away and no one the wiser."

Georgy recoiled, clutching at the back of a chair.

"Now, before you speak, just so's you sha'n't try the highfalutin and feel a fool afterwards, let me say this. I know you've a very high idea of being a faithful wife, I admire you for it; it shows how I'll bind you to me with cords that'll cut into your flesh and make you scream with joy. But if you think Otto objects, I told him in confidence what my terms for burying this crime was going to be, and got him to give me this note. Look, read it!"

It was a tear-blurred scrawl in Otto's hand, neat even in the worst stress of emotion.

*"For God's sake do what Joe asks. It's the only way to save me and the kinchin."*

Georgy laid the note down on her dressing table. In a vague, mechanical way she took up a hare's foot, laid a streak of rouge on her face and rubbed it out again.

"What are you playing at?" snapped Rixen. "Can't you answer?"

She turned round on him with a flare in her distended grey eyes that made him recoil.

"Steady now," he warned her; "don't go off the deep end! You want to keep your head now, if ever, my girl. It's only a step to O'Ferrall's office, and I'll take it if you keep me hanging about much longer."

She shuddered and clasped her hands over her forehead. "Wait!" she panted. "I can't think . . . can't you see what you've done to me? . . . Give me time, till to-morrow, at least."

He peered at her with ferocious intensity. "It's not no, then?"

"I can't say . . . what's the good of maddening me? . . . to-morrow."

"I'll give you till to-morrow, Georgy dear. You think over that note." She shuddered violently again. "Yes . . . I'll leave it with you. Whatever you think of me, you know I'm not so low-down as that . . . And don't forget the kid, my dear. Three years I should say, it 'ud be."

As she stood swaying, a fanfare of trumpets and a sound of loud-voiced shouting by announcers, out beyond the Freaks' Hall, warned her that the Circus was about to begin.

5

High up, in the centre section of the big top, the flying trapeze troupe shimmered in a circle of light, throwing gigantic shadows on the roofing. But it was to pierce the gloom below that Darrell Carless, shading his eyes with his programme, peered and twisted in his seat. The dark arena seemed as crowded and busy as if a town were being built in it. Dim timbered structures, rather like



the ancient siege towers he had seen in Griffiths's film *Intolerance*, were rumbling in, drawn by panting motors, and massing up shadowily at each end of the track. Below them swarms of arena hands were tugging at great sheets, which, in the occasional flashes from the electric torches that guided the work, showed as shallow zinc basins. There was a burst of muffled hammering, the locking of metal catches; men holding little lanterns swung intrepidly from beam to beam of the half-discernible scaffolding, and flaps of canvas fell over on cords. Another tower loomed up, moving unsteadily on rollers to the centre; quick workers knocked away the wheels and began to wedge and chain it into stability. Darrell made out a long rope of hose being carried by a line of men on their shoulders; and then for a moment, drowning the music of the trapeze act, came the roar of some hidden tank filling with water.

Darrell was experienced enough to realise that the erection now being completed was in its way as much a triumph as the stupefying feat to which it was to serve as apparatus. Only Jorum and his resources made such a piece of scene-shifting possible in the time. There was a long chord and the trapeze artists went shining down their long white rope to the ground, to vanish as the spotlights were shut off on their landing.

A moment's darkness followed, filled with the excited murmuring and stirring of the audience; then two limes focussed suddenly on a clear spot of the arena, and displayed Jorum himself, in bulging dress clothes, his white hair glistening under the rays. His worn, cracked voice seemed to have lost much of its carrying power; Darrell could only collect a scattered phrase or two: "miraculous horse and miraculous rider"—"a woman's tender frame with a man's iron courage"—"a daily and nightly gamble with Death", and then the old man bowed deeply as the lights switched off his figure.

The band broke into a deep, swelling melody, and blue moonlight, flooding the scene, revealed at each end of the arena high snow-mountains sloping down to the broken arches of a Gothic bridge. Built from plans drawn by Professor Heinzellmann of the Vienna Opera, it was profusely ornamented with mediæval statues and gargoyles, demon heads supporting the pillars and

winged angels making a coping to the parapet. The two shattered arches at each end towered a good sixty feet above the arena, and between them and the fragment of the central arch that rose, affording no foothold, on a lonely needle of rock midway across, there stretched gaps of which Darrell was afraid even to try to compute the joint length. He cast desperately about in his mind for figures of horses' jumping records, as he measured the distance with his eye, and, in spite of being an old stager himself, suddenly found his forehead wet.

Startling him in the middle of his calculations, came a roaring of water, and from each side of the central pinnacle, as from below the two ends of the bridge, torrents spouted forth, falling in a fourfold stream into the basins at the foot of the rocks. Coloured lights played upon them, turning them from iridescent blue to orange and red and gold. Then the display shut off; the lights went full up, betraying the illusory mountains and stonework as streaked and painted canvas; and from a castle door in the lower rock-wall a red figure burst on a great piebald horse and amid welcoming applause raced at top speed round the arena.

Swiftly Georgy pulled up in the space between the middle arch and the higher peak on Darrell's right hand. For a moment she sat still in her pointed crimson saddle, holding in the fringed red rein, while a groom detached her cloak, leaving her in close-fitting tunic and tights, and Saffelli, the equestrian director, pointed her out to the audience with his glittering top hat. Then, to a lilting melody from the orchestra, Patrico began to walk up a winding path to the mountain top. His feet could be heard through the soft playing of the band thudding on the concealed boards, covered with coconut fibre. On reaching the summit, a small square space, he turned round and halted, facing the long incline down to the leap. From the seats below, he looked a black and white toy from a Noah's Ark, his rider a red tin soldier. The crooning music stopped . . .

At the faint blast of Saffelli's whistle far below, Georgy roused herself from her stupor, tightening rein and driving her feet forward into the stirrups. She gazed alertly down the sweep of the track, to see that it was clear and dry — she dared take no risk of small obstacles or slippery patches, which, once Patrico were

launched on his thunderbolt of a rush, would mean disaster. Then she sat back, settling herself in her seat, waiting for the signal. But Saffelli was fussing over a loose leaf in one of the water basins below; she could see the tiny white patch of his breeches as he bent over it with a green-uniformed mannikin beside him; and again the double medallion that had haunted her all the evening, Pansy's tear-flushed face and quivering lips, Rixen's beak of prey and tremulous spidery fingers, rose before her. . . . What was the wop doing down there? Why could he not blow his whistle, release the waterfalls and let her get free, to attend to what really mattered?

She gazed down at the tiny saucers that were actually thirty-foot basins, at the dark ants carrying out Saffelli's instructions, at the curved red thread of the barrier enclosing the oblong brown tablecloth that was the three hundred foot arena. She glanced up at the immense begrimed pavilions that shrouded the glaring lights—but she must not dazzle her eyes with them—at the arm-thick cables and the great patches in the canvas-roofing. Then she let her look stray over the rows of upturned pink faces, little ovals diminishing down to the seats below and enlarging, taking shape and feature as the cheap seats mounted up on each side to the top tier some twenty feet beneath her. She saw with keen eyes an old man with a ragged fringe of beard gaping at her; a small girl, spellbound, straining forward on her feet against her mother's hold; a hammer-headed, hollow-cheeked youth, gnawing his fingers as he seemingly calculated heights and distances—and then the face of Darrell Carless!

Georgy started and turned sideways in her saddle, peering across the gulf of air with open mouth. It was incredible, impossible—but no, there was no doubting it. She saw the well-remembered slow smile break out as he realised that she had seen him and a white flutter as he waved his programme. . . .

Two petulant little pipes sounded from far below. She swung round to her task, with a lightening of all her weary body and a thrill of warmth through all her chilled veins. The white-breeched puppet below was gesticulating violently now with its thimble of a hat. She signalled with her hand and Saffelli grew still; the last whisperings and cracklings hushed all over the

gigantic hall of canvas. She felt Patrico's mouth and gripped her small red-stained switch. Up from the chasm at her feet there cracked three tiny shouts. "Are — you — ready?"

As the waterfalls tumbled out afresh with a hiss and a bellow, Carless, starting from his seat with excitement, saw a flash of colour — white, black and scarlet turned to a running streak — dart down the incline to the bridge. Something rose with incredible slowness into the air — Darrell could see clearly now, swimming over the central pinnacle, Patrico's arched back, his head straining forward over his forelegs, and the red form crouched forward on his withers — to land with a reverberant thud louder than the roar of the water on the matted boards upon the further side. . . . It was over, and the blare of the brass and the volleying of applause competed in pandemonium as horse and rider fled down a spiral slope and stopped, the horse prancing and snorting, Georgy leaning back laughing and waving her hand in the centre of the arena. And even amid his amazement at the feat, Darrell was too keen a horseman not to notice the centaur-like security with which she swayed to balance the abrupt check of Patrico's gallop. He saw the sculptured Amazon again.

6

To Darrell, waiting in the narrow alley upon which the side door of the old factory stables, now occupied by the ring horses, opened (for this was the secluded rendezvous pointed out in the scribble that a panting page boy had given him as the audience streamed away from the circus), to Darrell time seemed to have stopped. The high grey walls that penned him coldly in might have been golden ramparts; he had neither cares nor responsibilities nor a life of his own to claim him at dawn on the morrow. She, too, was neither wife nor mother nor circus worker; there were only their two souls, only one soul that had been cut in half and was coming together again. They would be one — for a few moments, a few hours? He could not tell and did not speculate; nothing was real but their meeting.

And when, unexpectedly for all his strained alertness, she ap-

peared at the back of a shabby group of emerging grooms, the meeting was filled with the simple joy of comradeship reknit. Each was too much occupied by delight in the other and eagerness to hear the other's fortune for personal emotion to take charge. Darrell felt, afterwards, that perhaps that moment of taking the hand of the tall figure in the dark, fur-cuffed overcoat and stiff black felt hat, of gazing into the happy eyes dancing in the pale tired face, was the moment of purest happiness he had yet known in his life. It had none of the surging rapture of that first embrace in Paris, so long ago; but neither had it the tinge of disquiet or remorse. He might be dead, but he was walking in Paradise.

So they passed, chattering together like two children, out of the narrow lane and through deserted streets with glimmering lamps down towards the riverside.

"I knew you wouldn't mind my not asking you to my room," she said, "there's never a moment of quiet there to talk to anybody. . . . What have you been doing? . . . Where are you now . . . farming as you used to say you would?" And, "What a marvellous stunt, Georgy!" he babbled. "You must be the Queen of the Circus World these days, for sure, aren't you? And you really taught that devil Patrico to do the jump, and, what's even more wonderful, wait like a woolly lamb on that little platform? I still can't believe it, but, my God, it's great!"

"Does it make you want to come back, Darrell?" she asked; and, laughing together, they took a turn that brought them out on a quayside, where the wide river flowed in shadow and one or two yellow lights gleamed from the dark mass of warehouses on the opposite bank, one or two crimson stars from barges moored in the stream.

They paced up and down in the misty solitude, their arms linked and almost insensibly pressing closer to one another, until, with a little thrill, he felt her long, cool fingers inside his hand.

"Don't talk about me, all the time, Darrell dear!" she interrupted him. "I want to know loads more about you. Of course you're married, and oh! I hope you've got babies!"

"Wrong, Georgy, dead wrong, that time! I'm still a sullen old bachelor." He felt her grip tighten on his fingers; she quickened

their pace without a word, and, as he tried to read her expression by peering under the wide brim of her hat, he saw by the flicker of a quayside lantern with a broken pane, that she was gazing at him with a transfiguring, almost maternal tenderness, out of wet eyes. His heart began to beat, and with instinctive restraint he moved gently to disengage his hand. But she held it fast and drew him nearer to her.

"You really could?" she sobbed in a whisper, "be faithful . . . all these years? Oh! Darrell darling . . . and to think that I . . ."

He stopped short and stepped in front of her. A wild hope had flamed up in him. "Georgy!" he cried in a shaking voice, "you don't mean . . . no, it's not possible . . . that you're free . . . that Otto's *dead*?"

She smiled almost mischievously at him, shaking the tear-drops from her cheeks. "And if Otto *was* dead . . . and I *was* free . . . you really mean you would still . . . ?"

He broke from her, blazing. "Don't play cat-and-mouse with me! Don't! You know I'm serious. . . . No, you never knew . . . in Paris, even, you never understood. . . . No woman, I think, ever understands what a man means by love."

She caught at his wrist. "Darrell!" she said. "I nearly drowned myself in the lake in the Bois, when you left Paris . . . yes, and I would have done it, if I hadn't had Pansy! Do you think I've enjoyed the life I've had since? Morning, afternoon, night . . . In the ring, outside it . . . what's it been? Only dust!"

"A star's!" he taunted her.

"Star dust?" she echoed him sadly. "*You* ought to know what its sparkle's worth. And, Darrell, you ought to leave it to the others to be unkind to me."

He took off his hat and pressed his hand against his forehead. "I'm sorry, Georgy!" he answered. "I'm just a brute. But for the moment you made me hope . . . mad things. Of course, you didn't mean it and I'm a fool. Come! Old pals ought to be too glad at meeting for a squabble."

She looked at him for a long while, without speaking. It seemed to him as if she was weighing some deep decision and he dared



not interrupt her. The grey eyes grew larger, more tragically sad as she balanced and pondered. He felt as if he saw her soul, naked and struggling, within her.

Then she gave a long sigh, and turned a weary head away. "I can't," she said. "It would be too unfair. No, I never have luck. I wonder if it *is* the opals?" She clutched at the chain which glimmered beneath her coat and he saw her bosom heaving.

He clutched her roughly. "What do you mean, it would be too unfair? What unfairness? Either you're free or not. If you're free, then, by God, you sha'n't give me the slip this time, Georgy! Can't you realise, this chance, if it is a chance, won't come again. Our lives have been broken; if we've a hope of mending the pieces, it's a miracle, and there you stand riddling to me!"

"We've no chance, Darrell!" She began to speak hurriedly with averted face, and sobbing.

"Is your husband dead?" he interrupted.

"No, he's not dead, and what does it matter if he is or not? Oughtn't we to be ashamed to sit waiting for the poor wretch's funeral? Like hungry, frightened rats!"

"But Georgy——!"

"Oh, listen a minute. Otto doesn't matter. I'm through with him, yes, for good and all this time. And I wouldn't let him get away with Pansy twice. Can you think I should? But I've a worse hand clutching me this time, and there's no escape at all, no, no escape for the star in her happiness and glory. I'm to be Rixen's fancy woman — isn't it funny? — and to go to it smiling."

"You're raving, Georgy!"

"I'm not. Just listen . . . listen . . ."

. . . "Is that all?" said Darrell quietly, as her long whispering, broken by sobs, at length ceased and only the ripple of the water at their feet was heard.

"Isn't it enough, Darrell?"

"If I can smash up Rixen's little plot, there's no other obstacle, Georgy?"

"But you can't!"

"Wait! Is there nothing else?"

"I can't bring you a thief-child for dowry."

"Pansy'll forget all her bad lessons at Misted Lake."

"You can't run away with a married woman from a circus to your family farm. What would your brother say?"

"If he could live to be told—I wish to God he could—I know what James would say. But he won't, poor lad, and I shall be the master."

"Oh, Darrell, don't torture me; you know it's impossible!"

He swung her to him and felt the trembling of her body through his kisses.

"But it's incredible!" he shouted, regardless who might hear. "It's our lives given back to us! Do you realise it, Georgy? The real life, and it's going to begin now. And this afternoon, Georgy, this very afternoon, I was still the prisoner on parole. Oh, God, Georgy, it makes me shake to remember. I was within a shave of turning from the door of Jorum's and not coming to see you! Just think, if I had . . ."

"But, Darrell, Rixen, you keep forgetting Joe Rixen."

"Not for a moment. But let me keep to what matters for a few minutes, darling. Can't you sing? Can't we do a dance together? Hullo!"

A bull's eye lantern came down a dark alley towards them. "A fair cop, eh?" Darrell chuckled as a policeman approached them with a mildly suspicious air. "All right, officer! I'm not murdering her this time—can't promise for the future, though. Good-night! Come on, George, this is the darkest street."

The policeman smiled as he dragged her away.

She could not help laughing while he rushed her breathlessly from the lights. "Oh, but Rixen!" she gasped. "You must tell me what to say to Rixen."

"I'll tell you. Lucky you came to an old bull like me, my girl, in a mess like this . . . Now, just you pay attention to what I order."

"Well, Georgy, what about it?"

It was the quietest time at the show, the afternoon performance well over and preparations for the evening not yet starting,

as Rixen slid into Georgy's dressing room. His eye was gleaming, his lips twitching into a smile of which he could not conceal the triumphant malice.

Georgy was sitting at the little table in the middle of the room, her head on her hand. Rixen noted with satisfaction the dejected air of her.

"May I sit here beside you?" He dragged off his lean black gloves. "Let's talk it over comfortably, anyway." His eye rolled suspiciously round the room. "Your dresser gone?" he asked. "Where's the child?"

"I sent them out together for tea, so as we shouldn't be disturbed, Joe," answered Georgy.

"That was right!" He patted her knee, pleased at the "Joe" which had hardly come on her lips before. "I somehow think you're going to be sensible. And you'll find I'm not the devil they've made you believe. Hot, yes! But not wicked, Georgy! You'll learn the difference. Where does that doorway with the curtain lead to?" He pointed over her shoulder.

"That's my washing place. No one can come through there. What are you afraid of?"

"Well, one doesn't like to be disturbed, Georgy, when one's sweethearting, eh?"

"Sweethearting you call it? When you've come to offer violence ——"

"Oh, no, that's not fair!"

"Do you deny you're making my honour the price of your silence?"

"Only because I love you so desperately."

"Well, Joe, I've thought it all over, and I don't think I can do it, really I can't."

"What? . . . Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I thought you were going to be sensible. But Georgy, don't you see I've got the half nelson on you?"

"What can you do if I refuse, after all?"

"Do?" He sprang to his feet furiously. "I'll go in one hop from this room to O'Ferrall's office and denounce your child and husband for the theft of my notes . . . and I can prove it too, don't forget."

"So that you make this cruel thing your condition . . ."

"Condition, yes, that's the word. Or price, if you like, part of the price . . ."

Georgy raised her head.

"Part of the price? Is there still more to pay? You never said —"

"Oh, yes, I warned you. You forget Seth!"

"He has his price too?"

"Well, you couldn't expect him, Georgy dear, to come in on it just for nothing. Remember all the worry he's had. Oh, I think he deserves compensation."

"And what does *he* want?" She rose with an impatient air.

"Oh, only a little money! I want to make that quite plain." He giggled. "Some things I don't share even with my pard. But I want to be generous, just to show you I'm doing it all really for the sake of you. So we'll go halves, if you please, with Seth's little solatium. He wants back what was stolen first . . . your husband didn't quite make up the full figure . . . and then another six thousand dollars, of which I'll stand half, will silence old Seth; oh! you may trust him."

Georgy came back to the table and sat down. "Let me get this clear. You say my husband . . ."

"And the kid. Don't forget little Pansy."

"Stole notes of yours. And as your price for not handing them over to the police, you ask first that I . . ."

"Shall be kind to me. It's not a fearful thing I'm wanting you to do, my dear."

"Let's have it plain, please. Further you and your cousin agree . . . you do agree, I suppose?"

"We worked it all out. Whatever is the good, Georgy, of going over it all again and again?"

Georgy laughed bitterly. "Oh! It's well worth hearing, I should say, Joe Rixen. So you two agreed that the theft should be hush-hushed if I helped you pay Seth six thousand dollars — six thousand was the figure, wasn't it?"

"You heard the first time!" snarled Rixen. "It don't get any smaller by repeating it. That's our — Seth's — price — are you ready to pay it?"

"Three thousand dollars and my honour, or you'll go to the police, is that it?"

Rixen sprang up swearing. "How often have I got to say it? Those are my terms. What I want is your answer."

"Three thousand dollars —"

"Don't keep shouting it out! Some one may hear you —"

"Don't trouble, Rixen," said a voice behind Georgy's back. "You've been heard all right — and taken down." Out of the dark closet where Georgy kept her washing things Darrell Carless stepped with a notebook in his hand.

"Yep!" said a second voice, as the curtain was pushed aside. "You've spoke a mouthful, Joe. You great boob!" It was O'Ferrall, the circus detective, a squat man with a small eye, a cynical jaw and an unlighted cigar turning and turning between his lips.

"What's all this?" stammered Rixen, retreating towards the doorway. "Some damned conspiracy!"

Darrell laughed. "Conspiracy! That word may figure in the charge against you, my friend!"

"Charge against me?" blustered Rixen. "Why, blast it, I'm the injured party!"

"Gospel!" interposed O'Ferrall. "Until a quarter of an hour ago."

Georgy noticed that the acrobat had turned pale and was twitching and quivering all over his lank body.

"Wh-what in hell's all this stuff you're pulling off on me?" he quavered. "O'Ferrall, I charge this woman's child with robbing me of notes to the value of ten thousand dollars."

"If you like," said O'Ferrall, "I'll 'phone the city police and let you make the charge formally. But I guess Mr. Carless here has something to say first."

"Yes," said Carless quietly. "You do just as you like, Mr. Rixen; but Mrs. Riegelmann here is in a position to bring a charge against you and Mr. Seth Rixen of compounding a felony, with blackmail."

"What have I said?"

Carless glanced at his notebook. "That you demanded an immoral consideration for dropping the charge and that you and Seth Rixen conspired to extort three thousand dollars from Mrs. Riegelmann as a further condition of waiving the prosecution."

You ought to think a lot more before you talk, Mr. Joe Rixen." He turned over the leaves of his notebook. "*That's our — Seth's — price —*" he read. "*Are you ready to pay it?*" "

"Don't pretend," snorted Rixen, "that you could write down my words in the dark there."

Carless laughed. "I learned to write shorthand in the dark, in the saddle, in the water, with my right or left hand, in the Mounted," he said. "It's all here and O'Ferrall could confirm."

Rixen bit his lip with a pointed tooth. "Very well," he said, "we're quits on this break, damn you! If you say nothing, I'll say nothing."

"Oh, no!" said Carless. "No conditions. Are you charging Mr. Riegelmann and his child?"

"No, curse you, not now!"

"Very good. Then neither are we making any charge." He put up his notebook. "Mr. Jorum will be relieved, eh, O'Ferrall?"

"Sure enough! Boss hates talk — of the wrong sort — about his show in the papers. Say, Rixen, what's wrong with you and Seth numbering them notes and plantin' them on dead purpose to trap that poor kid? Guess there might have been a trail to follow there too."

"To hell with you!" growled Rixen, picking up his hat.

But as he lurched for the door, Georgy made a mistake. Relief and the sense of her glorious freedom for a moment overcame her. "Oh! Darrell!" she sobbed. "Darrell!"

Rixen swung round and intercepted the look the lovers exchanged.

His face, which had been one of haggard, almost pitiable defeat, changed. Georgy, with a shiver, recognised that twisted look running all down his features which used to terrify her so much in her younger days, a distortion that had seldom been perceptible of late.

"Oh! So that's it!" he said. "That's the little game. Put up the kid to thieve my money and off with the lover to spend it while the husband does time. You think you can get away with it, Georgy?"

"If any one took any money from you, you got it all back, you



know," said Carless. "Mrs. Riegelmann gets away with nothing."

"We shall see!" The squint and twist of Rixen's face grew more pronounced, so that O'Ferrall stared at him in amazement. "She gets away, does she?" He was rubbing his hands and shifting backwards and forwards, almost hopping, from one foot to the other. "Where's she going, Mr. Darrell Carless?"

"Mind your own damned business."

"A long way off, perhaps; yes, perhaps! Who knows, Mr. Carless? But I wish you joy, Georgy. You've had such a life of toil and misfortune; now you're going right away, out of it all. How nice! What peace!" He giggled.

"Say, is this guy locoed?" enquired O'Ferrall, lifting the cigar from his mouth in bewilderment.

"Going to find happiness, eh, Georgy? Remember what I told you! The road to heaven is the path of pain. The parsons tell us that in the churches, don't they, Mr. Darrell Carless?"

"To hell out of this, Rixen, you're plumb crazed! You want a keeper."

"Good-bye, Georgy," said Joe Rixen. "*Bon voyage!*"

8

"If you feel like this, Georgy," urged Darrell, "why not come away at once? It's the only way to prove these fears are just nerves."

Georgy shook an obstinate head. They had drifted back again in the course of their discussion to the little quay by the riverside, raw this morning with a cutting wind that lashed the grey river into foaming wrinkles and spread a blight over the dull sky; the misty warehouses and the dim cylindrical shapes of the grain elevators on the opposite bank. Darrell lit a cigarette with difficulty in the biting wind; while Georgy, her coat collar drawn up high, seemed to be listening to the hoots and clinkings that are carried everywhere by the breezes over this city of giant railroad yards.

"No," she said, "I can't let Jorum down like that."

"Isn't he stuffed full enough of ill-gotten dollars to bear the

loss of you for the concluding week of a tour that must have brought him in thousands upon thousands?"

"A contract's a contract, Darrell. It goes against all my instincts to break it. Besides, where's the need? And what could make a larger hue and cry after us than to stage a sensational disappearance in the middle of the show? Whereas I can slip into one of those trains — how I wish it could be to-day, though! — without anybody taking any notice, next Sunday, when the tour's finished."

"As you like, dearest. I only felt you were getting morbid and wanted to cut the suspense short."

"No, we'll stick to our plan. You take the train to-morrow to go to that business of yours up-country —"

"Two hundred miles from you," growled Darrell, "and nearly as far from your new home!"

"All the better. The farther you are, the fainter the scent. I go out on Sunday and you come down to meet me at Salisbury. After that, you take charge of our three lives, and I have a long rest!"

He smiled exultingly. "All right! But you must argue with yourself! There's nothing can happen to you in this last week. Say, don't you trust Patrico perhaps? Is he turning queer?"

"He's as safe as a switchback, Darrell dear!"

"Then what are you afraid of?"

"I can't tell. But I wish it was Sunday. There, I can't get any further. I'm just praying for Sunday!"

"Are you afraid of that snake Rixen?" persisted Darrell. "Because I don't think you need to be. By what I can learn — for I'm too much the copper still not to see I get plenty information — Rixen's pretty well broken. We scared him stiff, and he's aged a lot since he gave us that turn in Paris. Damn him, though, for poor old Trooper's sake!"

"That showed," murmured Georgy with an uneasy movement, "that he doesn't stick at much when he's crossed."

"He usen't to. But they say he sits about drinking in a half-stupid way since O'Ferrall and I threatened him. And (did you hear of it?) it appears he had some kind of a fit the other afternoon before the show. Raved about and smashed things; then heeled over and lay like a log for nearly an hour. They were

afraid he'd burst some blood vessel. Ask me, he ought to be certified. What have you to fear from an old luney like him if you keep your eyes skinned properly?"

"It's just the lunatic I fear, Darrell."

"Well, you won't be unprotected, even if I am away. I've buttered O'Ferrall's parsnips so that he'll keep a weather eye on you and your apparatus these last few performances. Honest to God, Georgy, I think it's Pansy you should be afraid for, if any one. Don't let Riegelmann get hold of her again!"

"There's no danger of that," said Georgy quickly, looking at the child, who was making paper boats out of a bag of cakes she had finished and dropping them into the river. "She doesn't go out of my sight more than I can help between now and Sunday. Besides, I think Otto knows he's beaten. If he has a game on, it's not Pansy this time."

A chime floated over the water. "I must get back," said Georgy. She took his hand. "Good-bye, Darrell. Isn't it wonderful that next time we meet we shall never have to separate again? I shall have nothing to be afraid of; the nightmare'll be over; and for the first time in my life I'll be really free."

"We'll have some gallops together over the Misted Lake lands. We'll do some climbs at our summer camps in the Rockies up on the roof of the world among the glaciers. You sha'n't smell sawdust ever again. I'll put you with your sisters, the real stars." He jerked his head towards Pansy, who was looking at them from a distance in an inquisitive way. "We'll make a fresh-air kid of her. She'll soon open out and forget her rotten father and his lessons—for I'll try and be a better father to her. Now you try and think of those things," he went on, seeing her face brighten, "and not about Joe Rixen and fancies." He drew her to him by both wrists. "Mayn't I, Georgy, just one? There's not a soul to see us."

"No, Darrell, there's the child. I can't be quite sure of her, unfortunately."

She drew back to disengage herself, and the opals, swinging from her neck, caught on the lapel of his overcoat. A gust came and they both stood a moment clutching at their hats with the glimmering thread stretched between them.

"They won't let us part," he joked, putting up his hand to catch the chain. As he did so it snapped, and two or three of the milky stones fell with little cracks on the pavement and rolled away.

He gathered them up and gave them back to her. "It wouldn't have happened," he scolded, "if you'd let me kiss you."

She shook her head. "Just say good-bye, Darrell dear, Darrell dearest; say good-bye and wish me luck. I need it."

"Good-bye, Georgy divinest, till I see you skipping off the train at Salisbury!"

"How I shall run down the platform to meet you."

"Like a young elk! I can see you! Good-bye . . . Good-bye. . . . Jam your knees in tight for the last contest, old girl; then the judges'll give the prizes."

He stood kissing his own palm where the last squeeze of her fingers had lingered, while his eyes hungrily watched her tall figure passing up the mean grey street with Pansy floating like a little puffball at her side.

9

When Georgy regained the lot, she was startled, as she hurried, dragging Pansy by the hand, down the corridor between the dressing rooms, by a sudden outbreak of clamour from the corner where the Rixen-Vaughans had their double compartment. There was a scream, mixed with a fierce mumbling, and then Seth's voice crying, "Let her alone, Joe; you're canned!"

Georgy stood still in consternation, and suddenly the door was dashed open and a slight figure darted through and crouched against the opposite wall. It was Ethel Vaughan, but Georgy had never seen her in such a state. She was half-dressed in a petticoat and vest, her hair disordered, and in her hand she held some small glittering object which she clutched as a missile.

"I won't stand it any more," she screamed, as Joe Rixen, in his wide, white Pierrot trousers, with his face whitened, but his throat still pink, appeared tottering on the threshold, with Seth's arm round his shoulders. His eye was glazed and his voice thick, as he muttered, "Come back, you bitch!"

For answer, Ethel, with her large black eyes blazing, hurled the object she held in her hands straight at him. It hit his forehead with a thud and tinkled on the floor, leaving a black smudge where it had struck. It was the tongs with which she had been curling her hair. Pansy squealed and Ethel Vaughan broke into hysterical sobbing.

From all the doors down the length of the shed heads were thrust out and questions asked.

"For God's sake, don't make a scene before every one," panted Seth, tugging his partner back into the room. "Ethel!" The girl flinched at his tone. "Get back into your place and dress!"

"Not till my brother comes!" she cried. "I won't go in with you two swine, any more."

"What's all this about, Miss?" asked a youth of the Linley Riding Family, holding up his unbraced jockey breeches with one hand.

"The slut's knocked my eye out," grunted Joe, with his knees wobbling. "Give me her whip again, Seth!"

Ethel screamed, and Seth turned pale as he threw himself with all his strength onto Joe and dragged him inside the room again.

"There's something powerful wrong here!" said the Linley boy angrily, and half a dozen heads, protruded through open doors, assented.

Georgy stepped forward and raised the girl where she shook on the floor. "Come into my room, Eth, and rest!" she said. "You can tell me all about it. It's all right, Mr. Linley; I'll look after her."

She put the half-fainting creature down in her armchair and told Pansy to pull the rusty bolt on her door. Mrs. Panzetti came towards them with a noise like a startled hen.

"Now, what's the matter, Ethel?" Georgy asked. "What have they been doing to you?"

She was passing her hands gently over Ethel's shoulders, when the girl gave a wriggle and a groan.

"Whatever is it?" said Georgy, bending over. "Oh! My God, Mrs. Panzetti, come and look at this!"

On Ethel's left arm just below the shoulder, half-hidden at the moment by the twisted shoulder strap of her petticoat, was a

little pool of blood that began to drip on the floor as Georgy gently detached the ribbon that had stuck to it. "The sponge, quick, Pansy!" she called, and the child with a white, staring face brought it.

Georgy washed the blood off and saw it came from three deep cuts, but thin as if made with a fine knife.

"We must bandage these!" she said.

"I fetch the doctor of the circus!" cried Madame Panzetti.

"No! Not that drunken brute!" replied Georgy. "Give me the lint, out of the basket there. I'll do it neater than he can. Pansy, run to the chemist we were in yesterday for your pills and ask him for *sal volatile*."

When the bandaging was done, Ethel opened her eyes and looked at her with a pale smile. "Thanks, Georgy," she murmured; "you always were good to me."

"Lie back still on the cushion, Eth," said Georgy; "but just tell me, did Joe do this?"

Ethel nodded with twisted, compressed lips. "It smarts cruel!" she moaned.

"How did he do it?"

"With the new whip."

"*New* whip? What whip? What do you mean, Ethel?"

"The one with the razor blades tied on the strings! He said he was making it, but I didn't believe him. He's used wicked whips before, but I never thought he'd do that really."

The two women looked at each other over her head aghast.

"Did Seth Rixen know of it?" rapped out Georgy.

"Oh, no! He wasn't looking when Joe let out at me. He stopped him at once: he knew it was going too far. But I'd had enough already," she began to cry again. "Oh, my God, I've had too much of it all."

"You can't go on this afternoon!"

"I must. They'd kill me. I'll tie some tulle over the bandage, Georgy."

"But where's your brother?"

"He never comes to the dressing room till the last minute. That's when those two devils torture me."



"Heat up something to give her, Mrs. Panzetti! Open the Bovril."

"Georgy," Ethel sat up suddenly and clutched at Georgy's arm with her unwounded one. "Since I'm here, I'd better tell you, you ought to look out for *yourself*."

"Why, Eth?"

"Joe's got something on you. When he's drinking, he sits muttering your name, something awful! I don't know what he's up to, but you should see his face when he keeps mumbling your name."

"I go to find a tin opener for the Bovreel!" said Madame Panzetti, slipping from the room.

"Georgy," persisted Ethel. "I'm afraid, I'm afraid he'll murder you some day, like the man in the forest."

Georgy jumped. "The man in the forest?" she cried.

"Yes, Joe done him in all right! I heard the gipsies talking round the fire when they thought I was asleep, the night he took me with him to the camp when I was a kid, trying to sell the horse again. Every one thought the horse had done it. So it did, in a way, but not the way they thought. Georgy, I don't ever know how you dare go on riding that dreadful horse. Don't you understand it's the very one?"

Georgy laid her hand on Ethel's cold little paw. "Ethel," she said quietly, "you must tell me all about this."

"I daren't. . . . Oh! My God, what have I said? I must be crazed to talk like this, Georgy; forget it, please!"

"You shan't be harmed, Eth, but you must tell me all about this. When we're alone!"

"I have the tin opener!" cried Madame Panzetti, bouncing through the doorway.

"Hush!" said Georgy to Ethel, and moved to her dressing table. When the girl had gone, she still sat there, staring at her own face in the glass, her chin on her hands.

"You will be late, Madame, if you don't dress," said Madame Panzetti timidly, at last.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### I

SATURDAY morning broke, and, "To-morrow about this time," thought Georgy, as she filled Pansy's plate with shredded wheat at breakfast, "I shall be jumping off the train at Salisbury." She walked over early to the circus: the great canvas halls seemed curiously empty and silent. There was no more rehearsing in the ring; packages and boxes already corded and labelled were in all the passages; many of the workmen were on various business down at the stations. "This is my good-bye," she thought, as she stood for a moment gazing down the long grey expanse of the arena with its three rings and tangled ropes in the dull morning light. A single workman was busy with a coil of electric wire; up in the bandstand two musicians were throwing piles of spare music into a chest with little smacks that echoed in the emptiness.

"If I could only see Ethel before we separate for good!" mused Georgy. "I'd like to get at the truth from her, in case anything's heard of Father again. But they're keeping her close, so's she sha'n't speak to me. . . . Well," she turned to leave the big top, "one good thing is that Walter's looking after his sister at last, after the telling-off I gave him. Poor little kid. She's going on and on in the grind, while I'm going to be set free."

She paused just outside the ring curtains, where in a shadowy corner of the great tent the mighty towers and other apparatus of the Devil's Gap were piled. "Good-bye," she murmured to them, "I shall almost miss you after to-day."

There was a stir about the yard and passages now, as she went to dress; the arena—hands were coming in, pulling off their coats, and she heard voices from the other dressing rooms.

"Are you there, Madame Panzetti?" she asked, opening the door of her own compartment.

Her father rose from the chair beside the little table and stood looking at her silently. He was very pale.

Georgy gave a scream. "Dad!" she cried. "It isn't you? . . . Dad!"

The figure moved swiftly round the table as she ran towards it and passed through the open doorway. Georgy ran after it out into the passage. It was empty.

"What is the matter, Madame?" She saw the alarmed face of Madame Panzetti, who had just come round the corner and dropped a great handbox she was carrying, to stare at her.

"Stop him!" gasped Georgy. "Don't let him go again!"

"Stop who, Madame? But there is nobody!" Madame Panzetti caught her round the waist as she tried to run past. "Are you ill, Madame?"

"That little old man; you must have seen him coming round the corner!"

"But I assure you, Madame, not a living soul —"

Georgy pushed past her and dashed out of sight round the corner of the passage. The old dresser stared blankly after her.

She came back after about half an hour, having searched all the circus and even the empty storerooms of the factory above, looking deathly white.

"Did you find what you were seeking, Madame?" enquired Madame Panzetti discreetly, as she poured out hot water from a kettle.

"It was a mistake, Madame Panzetti," murmured Georgy, as she sank on her chair before the mirror. She made an effort at a smile. "I'm sorry if I knocked against you in the passage."

"Oh, that is nothing. But you look bad, Mrs. Riegelmann. *Dio mio*, and your hands shaking! Can I get you anything?"

"No, no! Madame Panzetti! It is all nonsense. Come, we must get on with it! I'm late. Give me the towel."

She was silent for some minutes, carefully making up her face by the glass. Madame Panzetti hummed a tune, opened and closed a hamper, then lifted down the white cord breeches from their hook. Suddenly she paused and stared at the rigid figure

by the dressing table. Georgy was sitting quite still, her hands gripping the edge of the table, the grey eyes of her reflection straining out of the mirror at Madame Panzetti with a look of terror.

"Oh, *Signor Gesù!*" whined the old Italian, crossing herself. "What is the matter? What do you see there, Madame?"

"Not for a hunderd pounds," affirmed Madame Panzetti to her fellow dressers, when Georgy had gone into the ring on Knight, "not for two hunderd pounds would I stay with her another day, if it was not all over. What did she see in that mirror? She is beevitched! So!" She grimaced and made long horns with her skinny fingers.

The big top seemed full of children, as several schools had been brought to the show that afternoon. Their laughter dominated all the applause with a fairy ripple. The sound lulled Georgy into a sort of dreamy peacefulness; it was long since she had been so unconscious of an audience during her work. The ascent and ride of the Devil's Gap seemed to pass in a flash. "Last time but one," she said to herself, as Patrico rose to the leap; then the piercing cries of the excited children filled her ears and made her laugh as she passed onto the level, bowing in her saddle.

The trumpets sounded for the big pageant which in Jorum's present programme concluded the show. The elephants, the dromedaries, the chariots all appeared; and her place was to ride upon Knight, doing the Spanish walk, just behind the little pony chaise in which Jorum himself sat bowing and smiling. As the procession marched out of the long arena, one of the canvasmen, with the slackness of a last day, began to open a ventilation flap before the show was ended. A wide sheet of autumnal twilight fell into the tent, paling the glittering electrics and transforming the tail of the pageant into a parade of spectres. Jorum's nodding grey head and black frock coat, Georgina's slim red figure turned misty and faint as the cavern behind the great curtains swallowed them up.

"All the same," thought Georgy, with a return of her sombre apprehensions as she began to undress, "it's time I took my long

rest. When it comes to worrying — and actually *seeing* things,” — with a sudden nervous movement she wrenched the mirror off its nail and hung it up with its blind side to her, “it’s time to retire. But where the devil’s Panzetti? Retired too?” She looked round irritably and listened, but there was no sign of the old dresser. “Well, never mind!” She counted on her fingers. “Six hours till the train starts, another five to Salisbury, and it’ll all be over.”

She rubbed her make-up off and ran across to her lodgings. Pansy at the tea table was eating bread and jam with her nose buried in a picture book.

“You might have waited for Mummy, little pig!” she expostulated, “and you’ve been told not to drop jam over your books.”

Pansy laid the piece of bread she was eating down on the tablecloth with a hurt expression. “But you said always to begin while things was hot. I thought you’d be cross if I waited.”

“Never mind, impl!” Georgy pinched the soft brown cheek and sat down to pour out her own tea with a sudden exhilaration. “Did you pack that case for me?” she asked.

“Not yet!” mumbled Pansy with her mouth full.

“Oh! Pansy, and I asked you to specially! I wanted to send it with the trunks to the depot at six. Now I’ll have to do it myself before the last show.”

“Dad came,” said Pansy abruptly over the rim of her teacup.

“Your father? What for?” Georgy’s face grew steely, her eyes cold grey flames.

“He said he’d left some papers in a drawer and he had a right to take them. Miss Carlotta was with him; I saw her standing outside in the passage. Was that why you turned Dad out, Mum? Will he come back? He said he was very sorry to leave *me*.”

Georgy did not listen. She had run over to the shabby bureau in the corner of the room, where she had been going through her papers that morning. It had a small lock and the key was in her bag, but it had been forced. Inside, her papers were in confusion.

“Pansy, you shouldn’t have let this happen!” she said severely.

The child pouted. “I couldn’t do anything!” she sulked.

“Still, there’s nothing gone,” murmured Georgy. “Yes, there is. My insurance policy! Whatever did he want that for? I sha’n’t

want it in a few hours, either. Took it for a stock certificate, I suppose." She had put it for tidiness that morning into an old envelope from her New York Bank. Presently she found a hand-bag that had contained a little gold watch and a few dollars rifled too.

She gathered up the other papers and locked them in her suit case. "Now Pansy, be a good little girl and get a nap before we start. I couldn't book a sleeper on the train: so I don't expect you'll close your eyepeeps much there."

"Cuddleums first, little Mum!" said Pansy, pushing her mother into the armchair before the fire and coiling up in her arms like a kitten.

With the warmth of the fire enveloping her, and the fragrance of the little body that nestled against hers soothing her, Georgy felt her eyelids grow heavy, and fell off into a doze. She awoke with Darrell's voice ringing in her ears, a cry of terrifying anguish. The room was dark and very still; and in the red glow of the fallen fire, she saw Pansy's velvety eye fixed curiously upon her.

"What were you dreaming, little Mum?" she whispered. "You were crying and calling, until I was frightened. But I wouldn't wake you; you looked so tired." She kissed her all over her face.

A coal fell to the bottom of the dying fire, and the chill air from the rivers seemed to penetrate the cheerless room. Georgy felt terribly small and alone in the great city with the child crouching in her arms.

She tried to laugh off her oppression. "I'm stiff all over with your weight, you great creature," she said. "Let me look at my watch. Good Heavens! Pansy, it's long past six! Do you know I shall miss my number if I don't run? Quick, onto the sofa and let me nail you down!"

Pansy gurgled as her mother played a game of her babyhood, pretending to nail the rug down all round her. "Bye-bye," said Georgy, as she pulled her hat on. "I'll come and wake you after the show and off we go in a taxi to the station. To-morrow and all the days afterwards, you shall have all the cuddling you want. There'll be time for it, then."



When Georgy reached her dressing room, there was still no Madame Panzetti and the stove had not been lit. The place was cold, dark and untidy. Georgy thought this desertion queer; the old dame had struck her as honest; neither did she seem to have stolen anything. But there was no time to think if she was to be ready to mount in time for the whistle. She made up clumsily with hurried fingers.

"Could have sold the house twice over to-night, they tell me," she heard a groom say in the next stall, as she went to fetch Knight from the stables.

"Yep, and haven't they packed 'em tight in the two-bit rows," answered his companion. "All the gangways filled with standers, clean against the law. Gee whiz! if they had a fire or a panic this evening!"

The big top indeed was crowded and noisy. The smoke of its cigarettes and cigars made a reeking cloud. It was the kind of restless house that roars at clowning, but hardly notes subtleties of art. Georgy was not surprised that she came off Ring 2, though it was the centre one, after her *haute école* act with only perfunctory applause. "But they'll like the Gap," she thought. "I hope it'll go with a bang for the finish."

She changed swiftly, pulling on the long red tights for the last time and smoothing out the wrinkles with care. Then, as she had time to wait, she packed all her loose costumes and make-up sticks, and unhooked and folded the curtain behind which Darrell had lurked to defeat Rixen, until the place was again a disused factory workroom under its one glaring electric bulb. It reminded her of a breaking-up day at school as she gazed a little wistfully round it, realising what a big chapter of her life she was closing to-night. Then she went out, and according to her practice rode Patrico up and down a few times in the yard behind the entrance curtains, to steady him and to test his temper.

Presently she dismounted and went to the join in the curtains to peep through. Behind her the army of workmen who set the apparatus for her act were drawn up ready in silent ranks. The

tent was in darkness, while on the stage nearest her between the rings a blue light played on the figures of the Rixen troupe, who moved like somnambulists through their pantomime. A writhing struggle took place as the Harlequin and the Pierrot dragged the Pantaloon (now played by Seth Rixen) into a wicker hamper that just held his body doubled up; then shut the lid and roped him in while the Columbine pirouetted heartlessly in a corner of the stage. Then every light faded except one direct white spot on the figure of Pierrot, Joe Rixen, who stood over the hamper tossing a long flashing sabre up and down in his hands. There came a gasp from the house as he plunged it through and through the wicker basket — and indeed, even the old stagers of the company never quite understood by what combination of trickery and agility Seth Rixen sprang unhurt out of the hamper after the sword had been withdrawn dripping with blood. But to-night Georgy could only watch in a spell of terror the face of Joe Rixen, as with a marble grin he exulted in his crime. And having watched him thus often of late, fascinated in spite of her repugnance, she noticed with a shock of fear that he made a fresh gesture. Raising his red-stained hand, he slowly sucked it, while the audience groaned in disgust. In a flash there sprang up before her inner eye the scene in the Waxwork barn years ago, when she had seen him standing with his own blood smeared on his lip after she had cut him with the edge of her ring in their struggle.

The white light flashed off, whistles sounded, and she stood aside to let the coughing motors bear in her towers. As the workmen poured through the curtains, the figurantes in the concluding pageant began to assemble behind. Knight, as a groom led him past, thrust his muzzle against her for a caress; the dancing of Jorum's Shetlands was heard, and then followed the usual awed hush as the great Boss himself came to the front and nodded to her before going in to announce the Devil's Gap. "*Presto! Presto!*" presently snarled the equestrian director Saf-felli, with an agitated motion of his arm; she remounted Patrico and rode under the canvas masking to the door through which she would emerge into the arena.

There was the usual tense silence, even on the part of this

noisy Saturday night audience, as Patrico walked up the last stretch of the incline to the summit and faced about. There was the usual wait, wearing for the nerves of the audience, boring for her, as Saffelli fussed about with the apparatus of the waterfalls, and set the tiny figures of the ring hands dashing to and fro. Georgy glanced affectionately at the row where she had seen Darrell sitting on the Monday night; in his place were two vulgarly rouged girls gaping at her through a cloud of smoke from a male companion's pipe. She glanced away to the little crimson curtains, like the trappings of a toy theatre, at the entrance to the arena. The two red-and-gold powdered footmen stood there as usual, but between them she noticed with surprise a white speck. She craned forward in her saddle; it must be, yes, it was, Joe Rixen in his Pierrot blouse. She smiled bitterly. "He means to see the last of me."

Up piped Saffelli's whistle; the band snapped off. There was a dead stillness in which the curling smoke cloud over the benches hung trembling in the air and thinned.

"Are — you — ready?" The waterfalls boomed out; Patrico leapt forward and sped down the chute; the bridge with its moulded devils and angels grew larger . . . Suddenly her nostrils were filled with a strange sickening smell of scent; she heard a wild scream and saw the great tent lurch upwards as the saddle ripped from between her knees. . . .

For a moment the house sat stupefied, as wondering yet whether it was not all part of what had been rehearsed. They had seen the flash of colour darting down the slope; then heard the blast of a terrified horse, a slithering of hoofs and a rending crash. Something red dived over the edge of the gap; struck the shallow zinc basin with a splash that sent spray over the faces of the spectators in the front rows, and now lay still with one scarlet leg over the verge and the disturbed water splashing over its submerged head and shoulders. And still every one, audience and ring hands alike, stared gaping, refusing to credit the impossible.

The next instant the storm broke. Saffelli and his men, shouting crazily, rushed to the basin to lift the insensible form; there were yells and screams all over the tiers; agitated men tried to leap the barrier of the arena; women fell fainting in swathes

along the benches; a programme seller was pitched on his head down a gangway which a stampeding mob, already striking with its fists, was seeking to rush.

Then came a long wave on the whistle, so shrill and imperious that all heads were turned at the sound. It was Jorum, his old cheeks distended and empurpled with his effort, and at the authoritative gesture of his arm the distracted mob paused, swaying to and fro like a cornfield in a squall. With rare presence of mind, the veteran showman had not only snatched Saffelli's whistle from his hand, but, as he panted into the arena, seized the megaphone of the announcer by the entry. His cracked voice rang to the canvas ceiling.

"Keep your seats, ladies and gentlemen! An unfortunate mishap, but the water has broken the fall and saved a life." There was a murmur of relief and the crowd stood still in rows, watching Saffelli and the attendants gently lifting Georgy onto a stretcher. "The band will entertain you, ladies and gentlemen," roared Jorum, "while we ascertain the extent of the injuries."

There was a sudden clatter of hoofs high in the air. Everyone had forgotten Patrico, who was lying tightly wedged in the mouth of the bridge, one leg caught in the torn canvas.

"Rescue the horse!" yelled a voice.

"It is being done!" declared Jorum, and in fact two or three grooms, seeing they could do nothing for the woman, were climbing the tower by the inner stair to release the piebald.

"I appeal," screamed Jorum, "to all the gentlemen present. Do not make a dreadful calamity out of a mere mishap."

His appeal went home. The crowd began to seat itself haphazard on the nearest seats, many on the arms and backs of the chairs. Jorum waved his arm fiercely to the band, which quavered into the waltz that had stopped short as Georgy began her ride; and, seeing that calm had been restored for the moment, he ran puffing on his tiny feet into the entry.

In the centre of a group of grooms Georgy was lying inert on the stretcher, while Knight stood over her, nuzzling her white cheeks. "Pull that damned horse away!" quavered the circus doctor, a red-faced, sandy-haired creature with watery eyes, who was feeling her body with awkward hands.

Jorum stooped over him. "Alive, Doc.?" he asked curtly.

"Well, barely," said the doctor, "but there *is* a pulse. I want splints and more bandages than I've got in store. She must have a constitution to have stood the shock. Look, this right leg's a bag of splinters; I don't know how many ribs gone, and when I felt her head I suspected a fracture at the back of the skull. Look how she bled onto me." He raised crimson fingers.

"D'you give her brandy?"

"Safer not, with that bleeding. Where's that blasted boy with the lint? I must bandage her head first."

Jorum's face hardened. "Tie a handkerchief, anything, round her head, and then pull that cap of hers over to hide it. Lift her into my pony trap."

The doctor looked up aghast. "But, Boss, she can't possibly be moved without splints and bandages, and then she ought to go in the motor ambulance."

"She's gotta fulfil her contract first!" snapped Jorum, his mouth folded, his beak cruel as an eagle's. "This smash is her carelessness, I reckon, and I've my audience to think of. She's got to ride with me and show herself to them—alive."

"Do you realise you may be murdering her, if you do this, Boss?" said the doctor in a low tone.

"Shucks!" said Jorum brutally. "There are plenty of *Spielers* in the world, but only one Jorum's. We've never had a fatality yet, and by God, we never will! Lift her into my chaise, you rascals, gently as you can, of course; pile the cushions for her. You stand out of the way!" He swept the protesting doctor back with his arm. "It's my responsibility, and if you interfere I'll report you to the council for being screwed on duty. Be getting your splints ready, you durned fool!"

The band broke off without an order, as the pony chaise, led by Saffelli, paced slowly into the arena. In it sat Jorum supporting with a fatherly solicitude the limp figure of Georgy, her head lolling on his shoulder. As soon as he reached the centre, he filled his lungs.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he began. "I am happy to inform you that by a miracle, Madam Georgina Dufay has escaped any serious injury. She is badly shaken and has hit her head; but the

water, provided by our forethought, has proved a safety cushion. Madam Dufay wished to show herself to you, to calm your natural anxieties! She asks to be excused from making her bow! Madam Dufay thanks you!"

One or two angry shouts were drowned in the applause of thousands of dupes; and how it was, whether by the reaction of unconscious centres to the familiar sound or some shred of consciousness in her fiery pain-dream, could not be known, Georgina slowly opened her eyelids and made a tiny movement of her head that looked like acknowledgment.

"Good girl!" exulted Jorum, as the clapping was renewed with mingled cheering, "you've saved my show; now I'll do what I can for you."

But Georgy was so still as they lifted her out of the carriage again onto the stretcher that Jorum looked grimmer than ever. "Think she *has* handed in her chips, Mr. Umberto?" he murmured to his lieutenant. "If so, it'll take a lot of explaining for me. Geel!" he shrugged his shoulder unpleasantly. "Look at that sticking on my coat. The handkerchief round her head must have slipped."

Besides the circus doctor, McCombie, who was standing with a pile of lint and splints ready, there now stood a capable, grey-haired man who looked sternly at Jorum. "This is Doctor Connelly, one of the chief practitioners of this city," stammered McCombie, "who came round from the front to see if he could be of assistance. I'm surely very glad of his aid."

Connelly bent over Georgy with his stethoscope, then pulled down her eyelids.

"There's a chance," he said, "which is more than you people deserve." He pulled off his coat. "Give me the lint, Doctor," he said contemptuously to McCombie. "Do you realise, Mr. Jorum," he went on, as he swiftly bandaged the head, the yellow locks of which were now clotted together with blood, "that a charge of manslaughter may lie against you for your part in this scandal?"

"Easy now, Doctor, easy!" said Jorum in a honeyed voice. "Do you realise that ten thousand people are now filing out like policemen, who might have been trampling each other like



wild beasts if I hadn't played a bit of a *Spiel* to calm them?"

Connelly said nothing; he was cutting the red tights from the shattered right leg with delicate care.

"Well," said Jorum, "I'll go 'phone the ambulance. Mr. Umberto, don't let 'em move a stick of that durned apparatus; set a guard on it. . . . Say, how's the horse? Did you shoot it?"

"No need, Boss. The devil mada the smash; he musta slipped and he's escaped wit'out a hurt. Just a long scratch on his fetlock where the nails of the canvas tore him."

"It's a mighty queer business," said Jorum, shaking his head, "and it'll bear looking into. Let not a soul go home without my leave. I'll be back in a moment."

He toddled off to his improvised office in another part of the factory building and 'phoned the police station. After ordering the ambulance, he asked for the address of one or two private nursing-homes, "not public hospitals, you understand," and arranged with the second and smaller one to take in Georgy immediately.

On his way back he was waylaid by a tall figure in blue with a peaked cap in his hand.

"I'm Inspector Davidson," he said. "I'm sorry, Mr. Jorum, but I may have to make some enquiries into this unfortunate affair. Has she a husband or any relations with her?"

"I'm about to send for her husband, Mr. Inspector," said Jorum. "And any enquiries you wanta make, count on me and my staff giving you every help. I and my private detective—you know O'Ferrall, I expect, a thoroughly trustworthy man—are about to climb up and examine the apparatus. Would you care to accompany us?"

"If O'Ferrall's there," said the inspector, relieved, "I'll let him make the first examination and report to me, if there's anything suspicious. Fact is, I've not too many men here, and though you cleared the house in a wonderful way, Mr. Jorum, I can't get them to disperse from the front of the lot. Seems as if they expect something more to happen."

"They'll go," said Jorum, "when the ambulance goes. But Inspector, if you can't handle 'em now they're quiet outside, what

would you have done if the panic inside had gone on? I call you to witness, I acted in the public interest by showing her to them alive."

He rejoined the doctors who had finished their work. Georgy was swathed in bandages and secured on splints from head to foot.

"Now," said Connelly, "we've done what we can for first aid. They must tackle the fractures at the hospital if she survives the journey. I hope you're not sending her far, Mr. Jorum."

"Kildonan Park," answered Jorum. "Couldn't get her in anywhere closer," he lied glibly.

"I'll go with her," said Connelly.

The sound of a bell clanging penetrated the canvas walls. "Ah! —there's the ambulance!" said Jorum. "Lift that stretcher carefully, you men."

There was silence while the grooms, guided by Connelly, raised the stretcher, and in that silence the murmur of the crowd still in the street could be plainly heard. It snapped off as the patient was carried into the car outside, and only the mournful clanging of the bell was heard as the ambulance drove away. Then the murmuring began again, louder and more excited.

"Wish to hell they'd clear off and let us pack!" growled Jorum. "We're liable to miss our trains to-morrow and I fancy, Mr. Umberto, the sooner we're over the unguarded frontier and back in the bosom of Uncle Sam, the healthier it'll be for us. Now let's have a crawl over that apparatus."

### 3

"Nope," said O'Ferrall, rising and dusting his trouser knees. "I can't see nuth'n wrong." He stood with Jorum and Saffelli high on the track leading to the bridge. "Floor's as smooth as an ice rink."

"Slippery, perhaps," suggested Jorum.

"No, I don't mean that neither, Boss! It's good fibre matting, splendid grip for his feet and no obstacles to trip him." He stamped on the planking. "Not a board loose, either!" he declared.

"She must have pulled him or something!" said Jorum.

"Seems unlikely," mused O'Ferrall, twirling his cold cigar between his lips. "She was a daisy of a horsewoman, Boss, for I've been a Rough Rider myself and can tell; and she wasn't one to make darn-fool blunders at the price of her neck. Either of you gents notice the knees of her tights was split on both legs? That's how she held to him, so's he shouldn't throw her, till, of course, he went down with his forefeet over the edge."

"I just can't comprehend it," said Jorum. He sniffed. "Say, either of you boys taken to scent? This place smells like a downtown cabaret in N'York — positively immoral reek. I been noticing it some time."

"So've I," chuckled O'Ferrall, "but I guessed it might be on your silk handkerchief, Boss." Both turned to the equestrian director. "Say, you been going in for perfumery, Mr. Umberto?"

"Nevaire in my life, you betcha!" protested Saffeli.

"Was it the poor gal?" wondered Jorum. "But I guess it wouldn't have lingered this long."

"Sure thing!" O'Ferrall wrinkled his brow and began to sniff strongly. "Coming from over here," he said. He walked to the canvas and *papier-mâché* coping of the bridge just by the take-off. "I've got it!" he cried to the others. "Look at this dame with the cash-book!" He laid his hand on a sculptured angel holding an open Bible. "Holy Moses!" he gasped, and bending down, detached a great pad of cotton wool glued onto the outspread pages. "Drenched in the stuff!" he said, coughing. "Faugh! It's enough to turn you up still." He loosened his flannel collar.

"Let me sniff," said Jorum, "only don't bring it too close . . . Yeah, I know the brand! Jockey Club dee Parrus, they call it, a nice scent too, if you don't have too much of it. Say, what guy's been up to a practical joke up here?"

"Joke?" O'Ferrall scowled. "Looks to me a mighty grim reality."

"You can't knock over a hoss with scent," objected Jorum.

"You can scare him pretty badly," replied the detective. "There ain't nuth'n a horse is so sensitive to as smells."

"Then," said Jorum, "our next trip is to find who's packing a bottle of Jockey Club in his hamper, a big one too."

O'Ferrall laughed respectfully. "Say, Chief, you're a bit of a sky-blue optimist. Whoever had the gumption to think of this play would have the brains to be rid of the evidence, now. Or if not, it would go soon's we opened the first lot of traps, unless it was his. If you don't mind, Mr. Jorum, I'd like to go through the poor little lady's effects first. Happen we might tumble on a clue."

On their way down, Jorum stopped. "Has she had any bad blood with any of the company?"

"Well," said O'Ferrall, "I was called in to a mighty nasty little show-down the other night between her and a certain celebrity in our programme, though I didn't trouble you with it, seeing it seemed to be settled out of court. I've my eye on a certain person; but let me search her dressing place first."

In Georgy's bare dressing room the three of them ransacked her luggage, breaking locks and cutting straps. Jorum turned over a pile of letters.

"See here, O'Ferrall, this looks like a love affair and a get-away planned. Think Master Otto is the villain of the piece — motive, jealousy? — Looks he had some grounds."

"Hold a moment, Boss!" O'Ferrall was reading in a large album filled with press cuttings. "Don't know what made me look at this, and my French is mighty rusty; but seems to me, so far as I can make out, that this very hoss of hers was in another affair years back. That's his photo, sure enough. Is he a regular killer?"

Jorum took the album.

"Oh, that. I've seen that! Yes, the Robertshaw mystery in Parrus. 'Course, now you remind me, the piebald devil — it had another name then — was accused of breaking his then owner's neck, Robertshaw, a trainer."

O'Ferrall took back the album and fingered the pasted-in cutting. "This looks like a check," he said meditatively. "If the animal was given to savaging his owners, it'll pass as accident. But I'm not satisfied. No, sirree, I feel in my whiskers it's all wrong. Holy Smoke!"

He had been idly scanning the back of the cutting, which he

had twisted over. "Just look here, Chief. Ain't this one of them advertising testimonials?"

"Sure enough," assented Jorum, peering over his shoulder. "Why, it's signed by Robertshaw himself; there's his photo in the middle. What's it for? Gee Whillikins!" he shouted, "'Jockey Club — *le parfum par excellence, sans lequel je ne me sens jamais soigné en gentilhomme.*'"

"Don't shout, Boss," implored the detective; "you may scare the bird away."

"Well, we'll call straight on Mr. Rixen. That your man, O'Ferrall?"

"Sure enough, Boss; how did you get it? It's he was tangled with the Dufay last Monday. . . . Twice over! A piebald horse, Jockey Club and a corpse. Boss, it's a paper chase, not detection!"

Before they went on to the Rixens' dressing room, O'Ferrall slipped into his office and brought out a couple of automatics. "They're a tough crowd," he explained. "Take one of these, Mr. Saffelli. I'll handle Joe; you draw a bead, if I give the word, on Seth and Walter. Keep it under your coat tails and be ready."

But when they flung open the door of the Rixens' compartment, unannounced, with a swift turn of the detective's wrist, they found a startling scene. Joe, who had changed to his outdoor clothes, was sitting on a box with a bloodstained rag round his head and a dazed look in his eye. The other two, still in their costumes, were whispering together and looking at him. The floor was strewn with broken glass, and Jorum and his detective exchanged a lift of the eyebrows as the same scent they had met with on the apparatus assailed their nostrils.

"Where's the fourth of you, the girl?" began O'Ferrall.

"I don't know," replied Seth, regarding the intruders with sullen apprehension. "She ran out after assaulting Joe here . . . she's crazed, I think. What have you come for? Oh! Good evening, Mr. Jorum."

"You look at *me* and answer me," said O'Ferrall. "What's been going on here? Who broke that bottle?"

"Our girl, I tell you!" repeated Seth. "Threw it and broke it on

Joe's head. He's nigh stunned. If I hadn't a thought McCombie was busy with your other casualty, I'd have fetched him to Joe. As it was, Wally and I patched him up as best we knew. We'll take him up town to a doctor now at once."

"You stand still, Rixen! What did those two quarrel over?"

"I don't know. She was talking raving nonsense. I should say she's gone nutty over the accident."

"She was very pally with Madame Dufay," explained Walter. "It seems to have put her nerves all wrong, if you ask me."

"Fact? . . . What was in the bottle she threw then?" asked O'Ferrall carelessly, as if his thoughts were on a different track.

"Scent," said Walter unsuspiciously.

"That's a lie!" Joe upheaved himself from his seat, his natural eye beginning to flicker and losing its likeness to the glass one. "I — we've no scent here at all."

"Then my nose is locoed!" put in Jorum mildly. He stooped and fished up a shard of broken glass with a piece of label on it. "Look, O'Ferrall," he said, "JOCKEY CL——, it's a cinch!"

"It's nothing to do with Mr. Rixen," said Walter, blundering deeper. "My sister took it out of her own hamper ——"

"Where he'd planted it, no doubt. Now come, Joe Rixen," went on O'Ferrall, "you want to tell us exactly when and why you fixed this pad, drenched in that identical perfume you had in the bottle, on Madame Dufay's apparatus?"

"Good God!" said Walter, genuinely startled, and Seth, paling, muttered something about "Frame-up!"

"I'll see you in hell, O'Ferrall, before I answer your damned interfering questions," said Joe, with a frightened eye at the corner of his narrowed lids. He took an uncertain pace forward. "I'm hurt. Let me go to a doctor. Else ——" He twitched his fingers towards his hip pocket.

"Saffelli!" sang out the detective. "Cover them two! Come, Joe, stick 'em up, right over your head; thank you!" He stepped forward with the muzzle of his revolver fixed on the centre of Joe's waistcoat and pulled an automatic out of his coat pocket. "Slap over them others, Saffelli," he said over his shoulder, "though I don't reckon they're armed. My, Joe!" he went on. "You're just reeking with your own foul stuff. Reckon it would sorta frighten



my conscience after a crime like yours to have the evidence soaked into me that way."

He turned to his Chief. "Well, Mr. Jorum, guess my part of the contract's carried out. We've still got to discover why it is the horse goes fantee at a whiff of this particular scent. But I've found your man, and I've not the slightest doubt that the evidence I've got with what I can c'lect from Parrus will clear it all up and get this guy strangled British-fashion, if you want it. Do you want him charged?"

Jorum shook his head with an astute smile. "Nope, O'Ferrall. Sorry to deprive you of your most legitimate scalp, but no! Jorum's Show before everything. That would be publicity without advertisement, a thing I abhor. M'rover, to prosecute this rascal is to own we've had a fatality in our arena. I'll never own to that while I've breath to spin a better yarn. No, Mr. Rixen, it hurts me like turning away a thousand dollars from a full house, but I gotta let you go."

Seth gave a contemptuous snort, and Joe, who seemed to have recovered himself a good deal in the last few minutes, writhed his lips into a smile. "Let me go? That's very kind of you, Mr. Jorum. Why, you grey-haired old swindler, you know as well as I do that you've not one shred of evidence against me! It's I can prosecute you for defamation, you Yankee thimblerrigger."

He took a swaggering pace towards the doorway.

"Wait a moment," said Jorum quietly, "I've not quite done with you yet, my boy. From this day the public will know the Rixen troupe no more; do you get me?"

"I'd like to see how you'll do that."

"Vurry easy for me, Mr. Rixen. Jorum's Show is henceforth closed to you —"

"I sha'n't starve for that!"

"And my brothers and rivals, Calhoun, Van der Rey, Hooper and Marcossou, Michel and Krauss in Urope, you'll find they're equally shy, when I've spoke a word with 'em. Further," he stretched out his gouty, ringed forefinger, "I'll write to every reputable agent in New York, London, Parrus and every capital of the world to wipe you off their books. They won't dare to run against Jorum, if they want to."

"You fat-headed old fool! You think yourself the Grand Mogul of the Show World, don't you?" sneered Rixen, though his face had gone grey.

"Steady, Joe!" put in Seth, in a quaking voice. "We'd best not quarrel with Mr. Jorum." He cringed. "P'raps, sir, we can put this right. My cousin, you can see, isn't himself this evening."

"Thinks he can bar the Rixen troupe from the world's market, does he?" screeched Joe, disregarding his brother's warning. "I'd like to ask him, what does he think my agents care for his big bowwow!"

"Who are your agents, Mr. Rixen?"

"Circus and Variety Artistes Supply, Ltd., London and New York," bragged Rixen.

"I am Circus and Variety Artistes Supply, Ltd.," answered Jorum. "Now get off my lot, Joe Rixen!"

As Joe tottered towards the doorway, feeling out blindly with one arm, a loud and terrifying roar seemed to shake the walls.

"Whatever's that?" asked Jorum.

"The crowd outside, Boss!" said O'Ferrall. "I wonder what's stung 'em?" Another snarling shout drowned his words; then came a hush in which a woman's voice could be heard uplifted with a hysterical crack in it.

"Our Ethel!" gasped Seth Rixen. "How'd she get out there?"

"Let's hearken," snapped O'Ferrall, raising his finger. The shrill torrent poured on and they caught the words: "Murderer! Murderer! Bloody murderer!"

Jorum scowled. "This won't do. She's giving everything away. What are the police about not to stop her?"

There came another yell for vengeance and again Ethel's voice: "—one poor little kid, waiting now for her mother, alone."

"We'll have the show wrecked in another minute!" exclaimed Jorum. "O'Ferrall, can't you do nothing? Run out and try and bring her in. Why did they let her out against my orders?"

O'Ferrall buttoned his coat. "I'll do my best, Boss, but," he pointed to the crouching figure of Joe Rixen, who seemed to have lost all his nerve at the menace of the unseen mob, "for Gawd's

sake don't let *him* show up, or they'll be selling us both for ribbons in the morning."

He crushed his hat on his head and dashed away down the passage.

"I'd like, Mr. Joe Rixen," said Jorum, bending over the cowering heap, "to throw you out to them, like the Christians to the lions in our last year's spectacle. Still, if I did, I'd be insulting the mem'ry of the glorious martyrs, and what's worse, smirching Jorum's Show."

"Don't put me out, Mr. Jorum," pleaded Joe; "let me hide somewhere, anywhere." He screeched. "Oh! God! They've got my throat; I can feel it already." He struck out wildly and foam bubbled over his lips.

"Lay him down somewhere," said Jorum to Seth and Walter. "Keep him close till we can get the crowd driven off. Why can't they 'phone for the mounted police?" He hurried away.

As he approached the great doors of the yard, which had been closed in front of the show, he heard excited voices and saw a group coming towards him. In the centre was Ethel Vaughan, her white Columbine skirts torn and draggled, contrasting with the savagery of her face. She was still babbling half-incoherently to O'Ferrall, who was holding her with the aid of two show hands, his hat and collar torn off and his face running with perspiration. Jorum looked at her in amazement. He could hardly recognize in this spitting wildcat the pretty, shrinking child who had blushed and faltered if ever he dropped a word to her in passing.

"Take her to some of the women, you two," he said to the men; "tell them to undress her and give her a bromide. Well, O'Ferrall, you had a tough job?"

"Did I not, Boss?" He leaned over, panting, his hand on his side. "D'you believe it, the little fiend had swarmed halfway up an electric-light standard to harangue the folk? I let on to be her father, but they weren't swallowing any; said I was one of the Yankee murderers; and laid ongentle hands on me—as you see. Lucky some of them British coppers rallied round and made a ring while I pulled her down and lugged her inside." He rubbed

his face with a wry smile. "Scratches, too! The durned little shrew!"

"Ain't they doin' noth'n to clear them rowdies away. Why don't they fetch mounted police?"

"Davidson's banking on the rain. It's just beginning; and when they find there's no signs of Joe and there's no one to entertain them with oratory, he reckons they'll go home. If he calls the Mounted there may be casualties, and he don't want them."

"No more do I," said Jorum promptly. "Well, I hope them gillies will be soaked to their silly spines. You better go get a clean collar, O'Ferrall, while I consider what's to be done with the Press."

Outside his office a stout figure was standing. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Riegelmann, is it?" said Jorum. "Say, you ought to take a pull on yourself." Otto's teeth were chattering; he looked green.

"But it is so offul! Mr. Jorum," he whined. "My poor Chor-china! I can't bear to think of it. Haf you any more news?"

"I reckon it's a pity," said Jorum, leading the way inside, "that Mrs. Riegelmann didn't experience the warmth of your affection while she was capable of receiving it." He gave a number on the telephone. "It looks now as if she'd never realise what a husband she — Yeah? Who's that. . . . St. Eustache's Nursing Home . . . yeah, Mr. Jorum speaking. How . . . oh! . . . oh! . . . I'm vurry relieved. . . . No, of course, I'm not sanguine. . . . No. . . . But what a wunnerful constitootion. . . . Yeah, I'll tell Mr. Riegelmann, I have him here. . . . He'll be down to see you later." He hooked up the receiver. "She's still alive," he said, "I didn't expect it."

"Oh! thank God! Oh! Thank God!" blubbered Riegelmann. "Whatefer should I haf done if she had been killt —"

"Consoled yourself, I reckon. You may still have to face the responsibilities of a widower, Riegelmann; so let you and me talk things over in a friendly way. To begin with, I want as little publicity over this as you do."

Otto looked a little bewildered. "Of course, the papers always make a talk ofer these misfortunes —"

"This time they mustn't. And I see you're not wise to things, Riegelmann. I counsel you to instruct the Secretary at St. Eus-

tache's to tell no one, *no one*, you understand, that your wife is there? Get me?"

Otto looked blank. "I don't quite see why you're so anxious ——"

"Would it make you anxious if you knew one Mr. Darrell Carless of Misted Lake Ranch, Manitoba, had it all laid out to bolt with your wife to-night, but for this contreetemps; and if you want to keep her, which I'll lay you do, so long's there's a dollar to be squeezed from the property, you'll take this chance to throw young Wild West clean off the scent. If she survives, take her away quietly, leaving no address. . . . If she dies, and that's still the likeliest proposition I'm afraid, well, I'll have to try to see the inquest is as little reported as possible. Anyways, I've fixed it so there can't be reporters waiting night and morning at the hospital doors for latest news. . . . I reckon our interests jump together in this matter."

Otto's face was a picture of complicated bewilderment. His mouth hung open and he gasped in the effort to adjust Jorum's plan of campaign to his own. He had known nothing of the intended flight with Darrell, and quivers of jealousy began to awake in him, although his own scheme had been immediate flight with Carlotta, so soon as he had brought off a certain coup he was planning. Jorum suddenly swooped on him, reading his mind. "Say, bo, you knew of this frame-up before it happened, did you?"

"No! No! No!" shrieked Otto in a tone that made every No a Yes.

"You yellow-livered prairie dawg!" said Jorum from his heart. "It's lucky for you I ain't curious none on the details of this business. Now, you follow me close. I want your wife to vanish so far as possible — if she lives. If she dies, to be put away without flowers or meemoirs in the papers. Do you realise what this affair may mean to me? I've the Die-good-and-go-to-glory folks opposing my licence in half the cities of the United States already, for what they kindly call reeviving the worst excesses of the gladiatorial spirit in heathen Rome. The Devil's Gap—I know I was taking a big risk with it—was grist to their mill, even while Mrs. Riegelmann was rakin' in the dollars weekly

without a scratch on her little finger. Now they'll call me woman-killer; mebbe I'll be lynched in some extra pious Christian burg next tour. No, sir!" He thumped his desk. "Jorum's never has a fatality. If this is one, still it sha'n't be one, I swear. You stand in on my play or it'll be plumb unhealthy for you, Riegelmann!"

Otto decided. "Of course, I shall do eferyrthing you ask me, Mr. Jorum. Only one thing troubles me . . . money!"

"Money for what?"

"The hospital, the doctors, operations, confalescence — if my poor Chorchina efer does confaleess."

"And what's the insurance money for?"

"She had no insurance. No corporation would take her after she begun the Gap. They said it was asking a present from them, not proposing a risk. They were right!" Real tears squeezed out of his eyes.

Jorum looked sceptical. "Even accepting that, and you sure do pile the elephant car on my credoolity, Mrs. Riegelmann's a rich woman."

"No, Mr. Jorum, you're all wrong there," he sobbed without strain, "I know efer y one thinks we are rich, with the salaries she has been earning. But we haf always been crushed by debt. Efer since that offul disaster when we tried to run the show of our own at the Old Museum in New York we haf had to go on paying off and paying off our creditors."

"Well," said Jorum grimly, "I never asked Mrs. Riegelmann to run in opposition to me who made her repootation, and in N'York, too. Guess it's her funeral — though the phrase seems a bit crool just now."

"But I don't suppose," squeaked Otto, "that Mrs. Riegelmann has more than a thousand dollars in her bank account. I know for a fact, Mr. Jorum, that she was threatened by Valerian the costumiers and Schmerz the electricians, conjointly, for the whole outstanding balance with interest due for the delay. They are getting frightened, for fear we leaf America, perhaps, without paying. So eferyrthing nearly had to go to satisfy them. Why, nefer, nefer would I have allowed my Chorche to go on risking her life, night after night, night after night, if it had not been the only way to safe our honour."



"Well, I can't help you save your honour, and if I were you, I wouldn't let such a small thing worry me any."

"But who will pay the expenses of the accident?"

"Trust in Providence, Mr. Riegelmann, that feeds the sparrer and maybe even has an affection for the toad . . . I've urgent business now. Good evening. Go, take news at St. Eustache's!"

A quarter of an hour later Jorum with wide yawns was dictating to his press representative, Rory Majilton.

#### "CIRCUS-RIDER'S WONDERFUL ESCAPE.

"Jorum forethought and Jorum organization averted a tragedy at the World's Wonder Show last night. Just as Madam Dufay was performing her breath-taking feat —" fill in about the Gap, Rory, — "her horse apparently slipped and she was thrown some feet" — don't start like that, you fool; now you've broken your pencil point, take this one — "some feet," got that? "into a pool of water, designed against the occurrence of any such mishap. Though heavily shaken and suffering from bruises, Madam Dufay was able to make her bow to the audience before the programme ended. Madam Dufay with her husband leaves Winnipeg for rest and recuperation, after the longest continuous tour ever undertaken by any Circus, towards the end of the week."

"Rory, take flimsies of that to every paper in this town; wire it to New York, Chicago, 'Frisco, Detroit. With it a confidential letter to business managers of all papers that if any organ is so ontrue to the functions of a free and independent Press — got that? — as to publish unauthorized and exaggerated accounts of the mishap, Jorum's Show, the Associated Vaudeville Houses Syndicate, and Transcontinental Fashions Ltd. will feel it a duty to discontinue advertising. Hustle with that!"

As the Press Agent hurried out, O'Ferrall came in. "Crowd's dispersed, Chief," he said laconically. "It's come on a regl'ar peltter; only a few corner boys standing in doorways, lookin' out for they don't know what."

"And Master Rixen?"

"Vanished! Skeedaddled! We don't know where! D'you care?"

"Not a red!" Jorum gaped profoundly. "Well, we've to be grateful it happened the last not the first night of the season. If

I'd had to comb the continent for a thrill to replace the Devil's Gap at a minute's notice, it would have about brought down my grey hairs to the tomb. Yeah! We've much to be thankful for, O'Ferrall; might have been a real, nasty business — this might."

4

When Jorum went out of the Rixens' dressing-room, Seth and Walter undid Joe's collar and drenched him with cold water. He came round pretty soon from his attempt at a fit, but was still shivering and quaking. Walter kept running to see if the crowd were dispersing and after about an hour was able to announce the coast clear.

"Come on, Joe," urged Seth, "let's make it while there's a chance. You never know who'll stir them up again."

"It seems to be all over the circus," said Walter, wide-eyed and pallid. "Those toughs ought to be dismantling and packing up, but they're standing about in groups, arguing."

"Well, we'll try and get him past while they're still arguing. Come on, Joe, take Wally's arm. Wait a jiff; let's see the corridor's clear."

They traversed the yard unnoticed. "My notion," whispered Seth, "is to run him out by the side entry out of the stables. Then he can slip up that alley and scoot across to Main Street."

But to reach the stables they had to traverse part of the curve of the big top behind the tiers, and here a group of three ring hands who were talking together ran at them with threatening cries. "Run, Joe!" cried Seth. "We'll tackle these toughs."

Joe fled into the open doorway of the stables, while his companions clashed with the ring hands. The men soon found they were no match for the practised pugilists of the Rixen troupe and sheered off. Seth and Walter pursued their way.

"Joe should be safe at home by this," said Seth. "Now, he'll hear a piece of my mind. Ruining us all, the bloody maniac!"

"I don't see why Eth need have split," said Walter sulkily.

But Joe had not run home. On his entry to the stables he had heard a hostler's footsteps at the far end and, terrified, had dived into the first hiding place. It was an empty loose-box, with a

barred gate that stood open. At its end was a long temporary wooden drinking trough, provided, like all those carried by Jorum, with a lid that could be locked to keep the water from contamination.

Rixen pushed up the lid, which was unlocked as the trough was empty, and slipping into the trough, closed it upon himself. He heard the hostler come enquiringly down the line and speak to one or two horses; then the man went back again to the far end and Rixen breathed again with a burst of perspiration.

For a while he heard only the usual noises of a stable; the stamp of hoofs, the tearing of provender, the rattle of chains. Then came a sound of walking hoofs, and the Boss Hostler's voice. "Put him in that empty box for the night," he said curtly, and Rixen felt a horse treading the straw near his trough. "Lock the gate," said the hostler, and he heard the key turn. This made a complication; he would have to climb over when he escaped. Soon the bright rays through the chinks of the wood dwindled and vanished; the lights had been turned out for the night. Rixen listened, straining. He was cramped in the narrow box, dripping with sweat, and the scent with which Ethel's assault had drenched his shoulders and arms began in his steaming condition to choke him. He went purple in the effort to control a cough.

Hour-long minutes passed. There was no stir; surely the grooms must be asleep; and now or never he must find some way out of the stable. Cautiously he raised the lid an inch. All still, but for a tiny red lantern on a post in the passage. Ah! The horse they had brought in, where was he? Rixen peered through the gloom and made out a tall, shadowy form with its head pressed against the grating at the top of the door. He slipped with the noiselessness of his craft out of the trough and approached the door. He paused; the horse stood across it; he must make him stand over. A small slap should do it; he raised a hand that wafted the pungent scent of Jockey Club to his nostrils as he felt forward in the gloom, and slapped cautiously at the dim haunch. There was a wild screech and a plunging body knocked him backwards against the trough. He sprang forward and saw a flash of white teeth, the glare of white eyeballs. The next second with maddening pains his shoulder was bitten into. He yelled and smashed his

fist between the glinting eyes that glowed red as they caught the rays of the hanging lantern. He felt the beast crash aside, and sprang for the gate. He had just gripped the bars to hoist himself up, when two furious hoofs struck into his ribs, cracking them like wickerwork and driving the fractured point of one into his heart. The shock flattened him against the bars, and there was a tiny tinkle as his glass eye shot through them and fell on the stones outside. He sank sideways, his head rolling on his shoulder; and his right wrist, catching in a strip of wire netting across the bars, sustained the corpse drooping. Inside the box squeals and the splintering of wood continued; the dilapidated building shook; there was a stir and stamping all down the horse lines.

"What in Hell's that?" cried the Boss Hostler leaping off the bale of straw on which he slept, and rousing his assistant with a kick. Both men rushed, the Boss flashing on a large electric torch as he ran, towards the loosebox.

"That damned piebald hunting trouble again to-night!" he panted. He turned his torch on the loosebox and started back with a yell as its gleam showed him a pale face pressed sideways against the bars, with twisted mouth and a gaping socket in place of one eye. He dropped the torch and fumbled for it on the stones, while the riot inside the box continued.

"Lariat!" panted his assistant. "That guy's sure alive still, I saw him wink at me. We gotta get him out somehow!"

"I'll save him, if I can," grunted Lariat Bill, tugging at his hip pocket. The torch flashed out again as a great white head, with a black mark like a welling tear on its neck, reared up against the bars with distraught eyes.

Three jerky shots echoed to the roof and the torch failed spasmodically once more.

When Lariat Bill's shaking fingers at length found the button, there was only blackness behind the flaking iron of the bars, and inside the box everything was still.

Jorum's Show, in the later editions of the morning papers, got all the publicity that the Press of a young and strenuous country can confer.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### I

Down a mean street on the outskirts of Winnipeg late in the following February, an elderly clergyman with a pointed white beard slowly picked his way. His coat collar was turned up against the cutting wind that raced between the houses under a sky dun with unfallen snow. The asphalt pavements, the cleared road surface, the street lamps were left behind him; ten minutes since, he had passed the terminus of the tramlines. A rough road, with its footpaths deep in trampled snow, now ran past clusters of shabby grey stone houses, with gaps between occupied by uneven humps, snow-pitted, covering the site of allotments. The clergyman crossed over by a good sized road house which had the name McGlisky above its wooden veranda; and then, just before the fields began, at the point where the city ended in a fringe of shacks, while, beyond, a white farm gleamed on a slight rise against the menacing sky and a grain tower loomed spectrally through the distant murk, he paused and peered through his golden pince-nez at a group of three houses with peeling paint, one of which showed a card with "Board and Rooms" in a dusty window pane.

The clergyman stood on the doorstep and pushed the wire of an electric bell from which the ivory knob had disappeared. The door was opened by a lean-featured woman with rounded shoulders, wearing a coarse brown apron. She had an air of unbounded resignation, but there was a watchful look in the depths of her pale-blue, lustreless eyes.

"Ha! Good afternoon, Mrs. Knox," said the visitor, smiling into his benevolent beard but eyeing the landlady keenly over the rim of his glasses.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Rogers," said Mrs. Knox, showing broken teeth in a propitiatory smile, but with a gathering of anxious shadows round her eyes. "It's a time since you've been round these parts."

"Yes, Mrs. Knox, yes — it is. Quite a time — quite a time!" He dangled the golden pince-nez judicially.

"I do hope, sir, it doesn't mean there's anything wrong? If you knew what a job it is to keep a place like this all that one would wish it to be, and not give trouble to the police or anybody! I guess I could manage right enough if it wasn't for the Eytalians, Poles and Checks, as they call themselves. The Germans are peaceful enough, I'll allow — but get one of these cowboys on a week's spree —!"

"Quite so, Mrs. Knox, quite so! A real struggle, I have no doubt. But you need not be alarmed, Mrs. Knox. The Court have asked me to make some enquiries about one of your lodgers."

"I haven't got but one lodger in the house just now, Mr. Rogers, and that's a fact."

"Then that's most probably the one I've come to see you about. Ha! Ha! There's a little girl —"

"Yes, sir, and have you heard anything about her? We're fair worried to death what can have happened. She's been away all night, if you'll believe me. Guess I was scared to death and it beat me to know what to tell the poor thing's mother. Has there been an accident, Mr. Rogers?"

"No, Mrs. Knox, no. Not an accident. Reassure yourself, my dear friend. The little mite's safe and well. Our Heavenly Father, you know, Mrs. Knox, — we're told he watches the homeless sparrow, aren't we?"

"I'm sure I hope it's true, sir. But when I didn't see the kid, come midnight —"

"Well, there was a little trouble, Mrs. Knox, just a little trouble. I'm sorry to say our small friend was taken up last night for playing pitch and toss with two boys in Randolph Street, and, as she would not give any name or tell us where she came from, she had to be detained until the Court this morning. Mr. Lancaster remanded her for enquiries — I'm afraid the other two were already probationers and had to be sentenced — and he sent



for me to find out, if I could, who she belonged to. Curious little slip of a thing, isn't she? So much older than her years! When I explained to her that no one was going to do anything to her and that she wouldn't bring trouble or disgrace on her parents by treating me as a friend and telling me the whole story, she said her mother was a Mrs. Feldmann and lived at this address. And that was all I could get out of her. *Such* a curious child! So reserved and assured! I thought it would be better to come along first, myself, and see you. . . . If the mother's a dubious person ——"

"Say, I just wish you'd step inside a moment, Mr. Rogers. You can lay what you like, the poor thing, Mrs. Feldmann, that is, isn't the beast bit what you fear. The kid's running wild-like, it's true enough. The ideas and the *language* she picks up always playing with them boys in the street—her that was that quiet when she first come. Sharp as a needle, though, she always was. But the fact is, I'm going plumb crazy trying to figure out what to do for the best for the pair of them. If you'd come into my front room for a minute and sit down, sir, I'd be grateful to you all my days."

The Probation Officer followed her inside the house, and was given a cane armchair inside a stuffy sitting room furnished with dingy lace curtains and plants with yellowing leaves in gaudy pots.

"There was a kinda mystery about them from the beginning, if you'll take my word, sir," gabbled Mrs. Knox, once secure of her victim, who sat back in the chair attentive, with the pince-nez held between thumb and finger. "It must be—yes, it is," she counted on her fingers, "thirteen weeks since they came. The husband, a German gentleman with mighty pleasant manners; Mr. Rogers, told me she'd been badly smashed up by a car on Main Street. It didn't need what he said, sir, to show she'd had a terrible bad smash, somewhere. Like a shadow she looked, white as my lace curtains there—well, they do need laundering and that's a fact, but you'll understand me, sir—and leaning on a crutch. She told me afterwards they'd had to take her right leg off by the knee ——"

"Poor thing, poor thing!" interjected the clergyman.

"She told me she would have been dead if the first surge in

Winnipeg hadn't volunteered to do the most wonderful operation, seeing the state she was in, that's ever been done here . . . Well, Mr. Feldmann said she was just discharged from hospital, and he had brought her here for quiet. She wasn't well enough yet for the journey home to where they lived, somewhere in the States. I guess I felt real mean, Mr. Rogers, in not telling them that this isn't just the house for invalids, not when the Irish boys from the road gangs are filling my attics and those Eytetians looking for a job up at the railroad yards; and I've known a cowboy in from his ranch on a week's holiday write his name in bullets on the ceiling of his room, for a forget-me-not, he told me. But you'll understand, sir, dollars being that hard to catch, I guess it's more than I dare to refuse, let alone Knox would beat me up if I did."

"Tut! Tut! How terrible, Mrs. Knox!"

"So the Feldmanns took the two first-floor front rooms, and the poor thing, after trying to hop about the house for a day or two with a crutch — my, she had some pluck! — went to bed and stayed there. There was talk of an artificial leg that seemed to be held up somewhere. But I'll lay my last cent that if it ever comes she'll never wear it. She's in a decline, Mr. Rogers, and her heart's that weak she daresn't face my stairs again, even if she had her two feet to stand on. The time she tried, I found her hanging over the banisters — dead, I thought, but, thank the Lord, it was only a faint."

"But surely this lady's husband is responsible —"

"Ah, Mr. Rogers, I guess that's where she's up against it hard. She swears he'll come back, but she doesn't believe it, and Knox and me know there's not an earthly."

"The scoundrel has deserted her, you mean?"

"Well, I put it to you, Mr. Rogers; he left here five weeks ago, paying a fortnight in advance, I'll allow. That seemed all square and honourable. But since he went he's not written a line. I know he hasn't, for I've watched the mails; nothing for her but a business envelope, a bill, I expect. And not a cent of rent have we had for three weeks. If he meant to come back to his lawful wife, which I suppose this is, would he have had a brazen, black-

haired trollop waiting for him in a taxicab at the end of the road?"

"Mrs. Feldmann has no resources of her own?"

"Cash, you mean? It's come to an end. They used to feed themselves, she and the kid. There's no food come into the house for them these last two days, and I put it to you, Mr. Rogers, can I feed them as well as let them occupy one of my first-floor fronts for nothing? I was for taking the poor thing a slice from our dinner last night, only Knox says, 'For land's sake,' he says, 'do you want to starve me as well as ruin me for the sake of these shady crooks? Play-actors, most likely,' he says, and they do have a sort of air of it, sir. 'Turn her out at once,' says Knox, 'or I'll give you a beating you'll remember like a week of birthdays when I come back from the Yard to-night.' But how can I turn them out, sir, to lie on the path in front of my house, she that can't walk? And with the child lost, too: though I'm glad *she's* found, that's always something. But the poor thing ought to go back to hospital. I've told her to send for a doctor, but she just won't."

"Well, well, Mrs. Knox. This seems a complicated case. I think before I advise Mr. Lancaster to let the child come back here, I'd better interview this Mrs. Feldmann, if you'll allow me. Would you kindly go up and announce me?"

The landlady shuffled up the shadowy staircase of uncarpeted wood and was heard to tap at a door on the landing above. Presently she shuffled halfway down again and, stooping over the banisters, beckoned to the clergyman.

"Come right up, sir. She's that glad to hear you've found the kid, it's sort of wakened her up."

The missionary creaked up the stairs and entered a long, narrow, bare-boarded room with a tatter of muslin across the little window, a blistered washstand limping on a broken leg, a coloured print of Riel's Rebellion awry on the blotched blue wall, and a narrow camp bed on which a long form lay stretched beneath a knitted white counterpane.

On the bolster a woman's head was turned eagerly towards him. Beneath a tangle of faded yellow curls, heavily marked with grey, deep eyes, streaked, as it were, with pain, were gazing at him

from purplish hollows. The cheek and jaw bones stood out in long ridges from the thin face, and the deep furrows of the mouth were like razor cuts. The parson's sharp eyes noted the strength and beauty of the hand that clutched the counterpane, with a wedding ring—but that, he reflected, proved nothing—slipping off an emaciated finger. He followed the line of the gaunt arm up to a short-sleeved nightdress, worn and patched, and saw the shoulders and throat falling away in shadowy cups.

While his eyes took this inventory he was making professional noises. "How do you do, Mrs. Feldmann? The kind lady here has given me your name, and I hope you will excuse this intrusion, if it seem one, and let me introduce myself as the Rev. Archibald Rogers, Probation Officer to the Fludd Street Police Station. I'm glad to say we've found your little daughter."

The sunken eyes grew more painfully intense.

"Pansy!" said a hoarse whisper.

"Pansy? Is that her name? She wouldn't tell us. A pretty, modest little flower! How very beautiful, Mrs. Feldmann! Well, we've got your Pansy safe, dear lady, and now if you and I could have a little chat." He looked round, separating his black tails, in search of a seat.

"I'll fetch a chair," said Mrs. Knox from the doorway, and in a moment returned dragging in a broken-backed kitchen Windsor from the passage.

"Thank you, thank you," said Mr. Rogers, seating himself by the bedside. "And now, Mrs. Knox, we don't want to excite Mrs. Feldmann. I can see how grave her condition is. If you would leave me alone to have a few words with her——"

"Oh, certainly, sir," said Mrs. Knox, without enthusiasm, and withdrew, leaving the door ajar. The clergyman rose and carefully shut it.

"My dear friend," he said, taking his seat by the bed again, "I can see you're ill, terribly ill. Let me, to begin with, relieve your anxiety. No harm has come to your little Pansy. Some bad boys were trying to lead her astray—of course, in your state, you couldn't keep a mother's careful eye on her—but the magistrate, Mr. Lancaster, has seen to it that she won't be troubled by *that* bad company again, and he has asked me to consult with you about her

future. We only want to help you and the child, dear Mrs. Feldmann."

He watched the pale lips trying to frame some broken sentences. "Good of you to trouble," he thought he made out; and then, in a still less audible whisper, "glad to have her back with me at once."

"Yes, yes," he said, cheerily, "you shall have her back at once, or almost at once. She's quite safe now, with the Matron at our Home. . . . Oh, that's only temporary! Don't be distressed, dear lady!" He leaned forward sympathetically as he saw the tears trembling on the sick woman's lashes and patted her hand on the coverlet. "She was making an excellent luncheon when I came away, simple food but nutritious, you know. You see, we feel a responsibility."

"I can take care of her best," said the invalid in a stronger whisper, her eyes hardening a little.

"Well, come now! Come now!" The officer smiled. "I don't think you're very fit to look after any one just now. You want to be looked after yourself, don't you think? You have a husband living, I believe. Oughtn't he to return and take charge of you and the child?"

The woman on the bed shook her head drearily.

"Mr. Feldmann will never come back to us," she answered.

"Oh, but that's very shocking. Are you quite sure? Have you written or got some one to write?"

"I don't know where he is, and if I did I wouldn't call him back again. Please ask them to send my child back to me. I'm quite able to look after her. You can't help me."

"Well," said the clergyman, fencing. "I believe a doctor could help you."

"I don't want any more doctors, thank you. I just want my child."

"I'm afraid, Mrs. Feldmann, whatever you wish, or I wish for that matter, the magistrate will need to be satisfied that this is a fit home to send her back to, so that she won't be found in the streets again. My dear friend, won't you tell me your story frankly? Your kind landlady hinted that there was some mystery behind all this. If you are living under an assumed name . . . well, believe me, the honest truth is never anybody's enemy."

There was a pause. The early afternoon was darkening steadily as the snow swept up. Above the crumpled muslin curtains the pane showed a dead-slate sky. In the fireless room the clergyman rebuttoned his coat and pulled on black woolen gloves.

At last the woman moved her head on the bolster and spoke.

"There's a bottle of Easton's Syrup behind the jug on the wash-stand," she said feebly. "Will you kindly give me a dose — in a little water in that tumbler. I can't get it myself. I shall be able to speak better if I have it."

Mr. Rogers bustled about, carrying out her request. After a few minutes she spoke in a stronger voice.

"I don't see why you shouldn't know the truth — if you want to — *now*," she said. "If it makes it easier for me to get my Pansy back."

"But of course it will, Mrs. Feldmann."

"That's not my name to begin with. I am Georgina Dufay."

"Really?" said the clergyman after a second's pause. He smiled with a little embarrassment. "Perhaps I ought to have heard of you. You must forgive me. Are you in the theatrical profession? Mrs. Knox hinted —"

"You don't know me? I'm the circus rider — was. I wonder —" she stirred a limb stiffly under the counterpane, "if I've enough left there to grip a horse again ever at all —?" She seemed to fall into a daydream and to grow yet whiter.

"You were telling me about yourself." The clergyman strove gently to recall her attention. "Did you meet with this dreadful accident in the exercise of your profession? I've heard the risks are fearful."

"Yes, smashed all to bits. I wonder why they took all that trouble to mend me? Wasn't it in the papers? Accident at Jorum's Circus? I don't know how long ago it can be now — months, I suppose. In the autumn. Didn't you see about it?"

"I'm afraid I can't say I did. I have very little time in my life for entertainments, and I've never seen even Jorum's famous show."

"I thought you might have read. But of course, Jorum would keep it as quiet as he dared. And Otto — that used to be my husband, Otto Riegelmann — he had his own reasons for keeping it



all — what had happened and where I was — in the dark. He entered us as Feldmann in the nursing home. Yes, and I too, that was what Otto would never understand, I had my reasons for disappearing. I meant to vanish and I did — didn't I, Darrell?"

Again the clergyman had an uncomfortable feeling that she was not speaking to him at all, that she was rambling through some dream bred of her long illness.

"Pardon me," he interrupted her, "if I say I don't see why you needed to *vanish*, as you call it, after a disaster that was not your own fault, so far as I can understand."

She turned her eyes, weakly wondering, on him again. "What, could I take him *this*?" She tried to exhibit her wasted form, raising her arms, but they sank exhausted to her side. She stirred the truncated leg feebly beneath the bedclothes again. "He saw me last in all my health and strength. Could I offer to load his life with what I am now? Could I ever bear the shame of letting him see me? Why didn't they let me die? Doctor Connelly brought that surgeon — I forget his name — to the Home the same night, they said. He operated and removed the splinters of the broken ribs from my lung and amputated the leg. The Sister said it was a miracle. Only this Mr. — no, I can't remember — anyhow, why did he trouble? I don't want to be — what I am."

"My dear lady, do you know you are talking riddles? Why should you not be grateful for God's gift of life, for the many opportunities even an invalid may enjoy? Can you really believe that your husband would turn from you because you no longer have the looks you once had? Is he such a man? I'd rather not think it."

"My husband? Otto? Oh, I wasn't thinking of *him*. I meant Darrell. Don't you understand?"

"I'm afraid I don't. But you're tiring yourself."

"*Darrell!* I was going away with him that very night. Now do you understand?"

"I'm afraid I do," said the clergyman, after a second's grave pause.

"You wonder why I tell you, I expect. Well, look at that."

She unclenched her thin fingers. They held a scrap of old newspaper.

WELL-KNOWN RANCHER DEAD. — We regret to announce the death in hospital at Winnipeg of the owner of Misted Lake Ranch, Mr. Darrell Carless, as the result of injuries caused by a fall from his horse, following a wound in his side received from the horn of a steer during round-up. He will be widely missed by a large circle of friends in the neighbourhood.

"Yes," said the clergyman, handing back the cutting, on which her hand closed again at once. "I understand everything. Mrs. Riegelmann — I think you gave that as your real name — you have been prevented by God in His infinite mercy from committing a deadly sin. 'Be not afraid of them that kill the body.' How true that is, how very true! . . . Yes, yes. . . . Well, I won't trouble you with that side of the matter just at present. We must think first of restoring your health. Has your husband left you quite resourceless? In your dangerous profession weren't you insured?"

"Otto has the insurance money. Yes, the corporation sent a letter telling me that, when I wrote to ask last week what had happened to it. In the hospital, when I was getting a little better, he persuaded me to give him a power of attorney to manage my affairs. Said there were so many business matters I wasn't strong enough to attend to. I didn't see what else to do and I didn't care. But I ought to have thought of Pansy's interests. I seemed to lose all my hold of everything, though. I'm not surprised —"

"You have saved nothing? You were earning a good salary? Jorum paid well?"

"I was his star. But there were debts — old creditors pressing, so Otto said. And the surgeon's fee and the doctors and the nursing home. They didn't let us down lightly, believing I was rich. Anyhow, I couldn't attend to business. It's all gone and Otto with it. He thought I was asleep when he slunk out that morning with his case. Perhaps he thought I was dead — 'till death us do part.' . . . It's strange. . . . But he's gone and . . . please may I see my daughter?"

"Well." Mr. Rogers seemed puzzled. "You've been very frank, my dear friend. You realise, you must surely realise, that you can't go on like this? Now that I know your profession, there is perhaps some Fund that will assist you? Or you may have friends who, if

they knew—I have found the theatrical profession very generous ——”

“Where is Pansy?” said Georgina fretfully. “She is a long while out—and in the snow too.” She was staring out at the window. “Look, Pansy, all Mother Goose’s white feathers. Don’t you see, darling?”

The clergyman rose. “Your daughter shall come to you at once—as soon as I can ring up Mr. Lancaster at his home and get the order. . . . (I’m afraid she doesn’t hear me.) Mrs. Riegelmann, I was saying your daughter shall come to you at once.”

Georgina seemed to understand. She nodded gratefully.

“Don’t distress yourself. It only makes you worse. To-morrow you must let me send the doctor to you. When he reports, we’ll see what can be done.”

He paused, placing a hand in his tail pocket.

“I won’t ask you whether you’ve kept up your prayers, my dear. Often when we’re fatigued it seems too much of an effort—doesn’t it?—even to say the ‘Our Father’ with intent. So, before I leave you, I shall just read a Psalm. Perhaps you’ll sleep all the more tranquilly for it when I’m gone. I see a scrap of candle here—let me light it.”

He pressed on his pince-nez, opened his little black Bible and began to read in a singsong voice, swaying backwards and forwards on his chair.

“‘The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.’” When he came to the words, “‘Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,’” the woman on the bed interrupted him.

“Why, Mr. Jorum, those must be the words they put on my mother’s tombstone. But I sha’n’t come with you for less than I said. Suppose I have only one leg; Patrico won’t jump short for that . . . Look out, Pat! For God’s sake! It’s Jockey Club!” She sat up panting, propping herself on her hands. “Oh, not the gulf again! It makes me so sick.” She caught at the missionary’s black sleeve. “Hold me up!” she gasped and fell sideways across the bolster. Mr. Rogers sprang up, alarmed at the look of her in the flickering candlelight. “Mrs. Knox! Mrs. Knox!” he called, but was not heard.

After a minute or two her breathing grew calmer, and he succeeded in replacing her head gently on the bolster.

"It's very dark," she said suddenly. "Is it the valley of the shadow?" and grew quite still. The clergyman satisfied himself that it was stupor and not death. She had a faint, irregular pulse and her bosom was moving. He took his hat and tiptoed out of the room.

2

It was a couple of hours later, almost six in the evening, when Pansy rang the bell. There was the sound of voices quarrelling as the door swung open, and in the hall, in the light of a dim oil lamp, she saw the bulky figure in shirt sleeves of the landlady's husband, a navvy from the railyards with flat, straw-coloured hair and a rubicund face, rounding off in a discontented chin that rose to meet the beak of his nose. He pushed his wife roughly off his arm as he swung back the door and stood for a moment calculatingly surveying the small child in her stained leather wind-breaker.

Pansy met his look with a cool defiance, her black eyes piercing him beneath the heavy line of her eyebrows.

"Don't be hard on the kid, William!" pleaded Mrs. Knox.

"Who's being hard on anybody?" retorted Knox. "You'll know if my fist's hard if there's any more blasted chin music from you. Say, isn't a man master of his own house? Now see here, Daisy Bell," he addressed the child curtly. "You and your maw gotta quit."

"She can't move from her bed, William," cried Mrs. Knox. "If you'd seen her only half an hour ago after the clergyman left —"

Knox drove his elbow violently against her ribs, knocking her against the doorpost of the little kitchen.

"Will that shut your face?" he asked furiously. "Or is it my belt to you? If your maw's that bad," he turned to the child again, "it's time she was took to hospital, not infecting honest folk's houses. Anyways, you can't stay here. *Comprenny voo*, little Wop? Quit!"

"How can we, without any money?" asked Pansy contemptuously.

"Well, search me! Shall I draw you a check or will you have it in notes, Signora?"

Pansy straddled her slim legs in their tattered woollen gaiters firmly across the relic of a doormat and stood staring at him, hands on hips.

"Ain't you sarcastic, Mister? Wait till Mr. Lancaster the magistrate hears of your goings on. He's mighty interested in me and my Mom. Do you know my friend, Mr. Rogers? He says Mom's to stay here till the doctor sees her."

"You young limb! Is this the style of backchat you learn from the corner boys in Randolph Street? Give me another spoonful of your sauce, my lady, and you'll feel the flat of my hand on your lace pantalettes."

"Pooh!" Pansy shot out the tip of her tongue with elegant emphasis. "You lay me across your knee, Mr. Man, and I'll kick the bark off your shins. And if Mr. Rogers hears you've indecently assaulted me —"

Knox gasped. "You're mighty thick with your Mister Rogers, ain't you?"

"*Reverend* Rogers, William," put in Mrs. Knox cringingly, from the depths of the kitchen.

"Well, is the Reverend going to pay my rent, that's what I want to know?"

"I s'pose so," said Pansy carelessly. "Or Mom will, when she's better. How is Mom, Mrs. Knox?" Pansy called lightly across to the kitchen, as though the navy were eliminated.

"She's asleep, I think, my dear." Mrs. Knox loomed warily on the threshold behind her husband's big brown arm. "I'd have taken her a cup of tea —"

"You'll take her nothing that ain't paid for first," bellowed Knox, turning round upon his wife and chivvying her back into the kitchen.

Pansy seized the opportunity to run swiftly up the stairs to her mother's room.

When she opened the door it was too dark inside for her to make out anything. "Damn!" she said, and walked promptly into the next bedroom, temporarily unoccupied, where she searched till she found a piece of candle on the mantelpiece. Carrying this back to her mother's room, she fumbled inside the waist of her short skirt and pulled out a crumpled strip with one or two matches still

sticking in it and the half of a smoked cigarette. She lit the candle with a match and the cigarette from the candle. Then she carried the light to the bed and gazed intently at her mother's still form. Something in its rigidity, in the dark tinge of the face and the glazing look of the eyes between the half-closed lids alarmed her. In the days before the doctor had stopped calling to attend her mother, Pansy had listened to his instructions, watched his restorative measures with a certain morbid excitement. Now her hand flew to her mother's heart with swift divination. She could feel no beat. She gripped the pulse; the faintest, doubtfullest beat at length seemed to respond. Quickly she flung the bolster on the floor and laid Georgy's head flat on the mattress. Then she stood back, looking round with frowning black brows; but she knew the green bottle with the smelling salts was empty. "Hell!" she muttered between her teeth, still holding the glowing cigarette end. She drew in her breath, sizzling with impatient perplexity, and the acrid tobacco made her cough.

With that an idea, half memory out of an old-fashioned story, came to her. She stooped and ripped open the worn covering of the bolster at her feet. Dark feathers came drifting out. She gathered a handful, twisted them up into the scrap of newspaper still clutched in her mother's stiff fingers, and set them to the candle flame. There was a hiss and a pungent smoke. Pansy held the fuming packet to her mother's nose. A little yellow flame ran over the edge of the paper and scorched her finger. She swore and squeezed it out with her left hand, but held on to the smouldering feathers. Then she saw her mother's breast suddenly heave, a cough came and a moan, then another cough and gasping breaths. Pansy fingered the place of the heart again, and through the wasted body felt a flutter. "I must keep her panting," she thought, as the feathers fell in blackened ashes through her scorched fingers.

"What for the Lord's sake are you doing, dear?" Mrs. Knox's troubled face came through the door. "Smells like the house was afire? Why, what's the matter with your poor ma?"

"Heart," said Pansy briefly. "It's going again now. Oh, God, haven't you any salts, Mrs. Knox?"

"Wait, dearie." Mrs. Knox darted out and came running back along a landing with a bottle. "Sal vola-*tile*," she gasped. "I take



it when I get that pumped-out feeling. Look, her mouth's open. Wait while I put a drop in water."

"A little — don't choke her, Mrs. Knox," said Pansy quickly. They waited a moment, Pansy's grimy, sensitive fingers still feeling for the heart beat.

"She looks better, I should say," hazarded Mrs. Knox. "Not so leady-coloured."

"It's getting stronger," asserted the child. "Gee, that was a close squeak! I reckon if your hubby had kept me jawing below five minutes longer, it would have been a trunk call from Salem One for Mom."

"Pansy! How can you talk thataway?"

The child sucked her fingers painfully.

"I'm scorched lik'ell, I am." She darted a glance at the bed again. "She ought to have brandy now, you know."

"We've none of that in the house."

"Then I must get it. Yes, and food. She needs it, and me, too. I'm as hollow as a drum."

"Have you any money, dear?"

"Not a cent. Mrs. Knox, loan us five dollars, won't you?"

"I daresn't, dearie — even if I had it."

"Then stay with Mom, there's a good soul. Knox can't stop you; it would be what the beak calls criminal hominside. I'll raise the dust!"

"How *can* you, kid?"

"My pigeon! You keep your eye on her. If she comes over again give her some more of that stuff of yours. Or wait! There's still a drop of the tonic over there. If she wakes up and asks for me, tell her I've gone to fetch her some supper."

"I'll make a cup of strong tea, that I will. The kettle's on the boil."

"Do! And give me a spoonful of sugar before I go. Don't stay downstairs too long."

Pansy lingered a minute by the tiny looking glass on the kitchen wall, damping and drawing out her soft curls through her fingers. Then she fretfully rubbed her pinched, pale cheeks and shot her black eyes round the room.

"Ha!" She gave a little cry of content. The hearth was washed

over with raddle. The child darted over and, wetting her finger with her tongue, smeared it across the red surface; then, hurrying back to the mirror, deeply dyed her hollow cheek. As she worked she shrilly and triumphantly whistled "*La Donna è Mobile*."

"So long, Mrs. Knox," she said, as she finished. "I may be a while. Look after Mom, as I said." She drew her black beret carefully over the curls; plunged her hand into a bag of granulated sugar; licked her fingers, and the door slammed to the sound of more whistling. All these proceedings Knox, from his armchair by the fire where he sat smoking, watched without a word.

3

The landlord of the road house looked up sharply as the doors of his wooden-floored dance hall were pushed open and a small girl with long dark curls walked through. A party of cowboys, awkward in their town clothes, paused in a dinner of great fried steaks and grinned amicably. A seedy, elderly man with protuberant fish's eyes, chewing a sandwich at a corner table by himself, eyed the child's slim legs furtively; two railroad navvies drinking by the counter turned round and studied her in silence, their thumbs in their waistbelts.

"Now then, missy," said McGlisky, fingering with a ringed hand his drooping walrus moustache. "What are you hunting? I've nothing for you, you know, so beat it, will you?"

"I don't want anything, thank you," said Pansy in her clear voice, standing in the middle of the floor. "I want, if you'll please let me, to entertain your guests."

The two navvies exchanged solemn winks and emptied their glasses; but a young, fresh-looking cowboy, who had clearly been celebrating his holiday freely before dinner, applauded loudly with the handle of his knife.

"Go it, kid!" he cried. "Sling your little piece across. Say, can you recite the 'Schooner Hesperus'?" He got through the title with some difficulty.

"Aw, cut it out, Sandy," said one of his mates. "Don't haze the poor kid!"

"But I wan' to hear it," said Sandy gravely. "Only piece I know! Learnt it from schoolmarm at Yaller Barn Creek. I wanta see if this maiden knows all I know. Don't rustle all them fried pertaters, Jake, you skunk! Come on, Missy. . . . 'T was the schoolmarm Hesperus' —"

"Schooner, you fool!" corrected Jake.

"Well, let her speak it."

Pansy smiled at the young man, who guffawed and tried to elbow his other neighbour, shooting his plate into his lap instead. There was an uproar and a wrestling match, Sandy protesting, "I only meanta say I'd roped the filly."

When it subsided, Pansy was still cool and smiling. "I don't re-cite," she said, "but I'd like to dance for you all. May I?"

"Where's your orkester, missie?" asked one of the navvies, and chortled at his wit.

Pansy turned her eyes to a case on the wall which held a musical machine worked by perforated tin records.

"If any one will lend me a nickel to put in the slot — " she suggested brightly.

"That'll do!" shouted the landlord. "We don't want no beggars in this house!"

"Oh come!" expostulated Sandy. "A tune to obleege a lady!" He got up with wavering legs and clutching the musical box, dabbed ineffectively at the slot with a coin. His comrades laughed and cheered. "Hold her down, cowboy!" they roared.

"I'd better put it in for you," said Pansy practically. The coin tinkled down into the machine which buzzed and whirled, and then, after being shaken, clanged into a dance tune. Seizing her cap in her hand, Pansy swung round on her toes and began to improvise steps to the music. The drunken youth, propped against the wooden pillars of the musical box, watched with a solemn affectation of connoisseurship. The other watchers approved heartily, waving morsels of food on their forks. The navvies nodded to each other and the old man's fishlike eyes gleamed greedily whenever the child's scanty skirt swung high.

The instrument blared and Pansy seemed to float round the room, her curls swirling about her. Once she tripped, as her worn

shoe turned over on its heel, and with an audible curse she plucked it off and continued to dance upon her coarsely darned woollen stocking.

At length the wheezy machine ran down and she stopped, panting with the exhaustion of hunger, a real flush tinging her cheeks. A burst of clapping and cheers broke out that startled her. During her dance the hall had filled from the street with smiling faces, and the landlord, filling cups and cutting sandwiches busily, was looking at her with a changed expression.

She curtsied acknowledgment of the applause, and then diving on all fours under a table, retrieved the shoe she had thrown away and began to pull it on under her gaiter.

The old toper shuffled forward from his corner.

"Set by me a bit, dear, won't you?" he said, leering. "I can see you're hungry. I'll give you a bite. Landlord, two breads and cheeses ——"

A strong arm seized him and pitched him back into his corner.

"Keep your iron off my brand, will you, old badger?" roared the young cowboy. "Think because I'm in my cups, in a gentlemanly way of speaking, I can't read your earmarks? If you want anything, miss," he said to Pansy, "you sit here and take it with my friends and me. Your mother'd feel it a heap safer if she know'd."

"I'm sure the young lady can have anything she wants in reason, on the house," said the landlord ingratiatingly. "We don't often see talent like hers here, do we, gents?"

"I'm afraid I must go home at once," said Pansy, eyeing the savoury-smelling food on the table with hungry glances.

"Put her up a snack then, Jake, out of that nice juicy piece in the middle. You wait, missy; we'll make you a cowboy's lunch."

"Ain't you goin' to give her no more than a sandwich for her trouble?" asked the third cowboy, a bearded man with shrewd, kindly eyes. "Reckon this young lady's a perffessional and has a right to her fees."

There was an assenting murmur from the throng round the bar, and a clinking of small coins.

"Hold out your cap, missy!" cried a voice, and Pansy, gratefully distending her beret to its widest, walked round the room, collect-

ing a shower of nickels. She approached the cowboys last. They were opening the pouches of their belts with friendly smiles.

"Ease up a bit, Sandy," said Jake, as he saw a flash of paper in the youth's hand. "You'll need a bit to settle down on in your old age."

"Guess I can spend my wad as it pleases me," retorted Sandy furiously. He rolled the notes up in a little ball. "Catch, kid!" he said. "You sure have got greased toes and little invisible angel's wings to lift you too, I guess. Yes, and I do admire the sand of you, holding up all these roughnecks to watch you, and you hardly old enough to sprout a horn yet!"

Pansy thanked him with a dazzling smile that brought out his fatuous grin again and fresh laughter from his fellows; then she rolled the edges of her beret together over the precious hoard. With the young cowboy's impetuous gift it amounted to twenty-one dollars and ninety cents.

She walked straight up to the landlord behind the bar.

"I want a quarter of brandy in a bottle," she said imperiously. "It's for my mother, who's lying very sick. Don't say you're afraid of the cops, Mister. I seen you handing it out behind that screen."

"Has the doc. ordered it?" queried McGlisky.

"Guess she's on the straight lay, Mac," said one of the navvies, eyeing the upright little girl.

"Well, I guess I'll risk it, for a medical case," said the landlord, diving for a clean bottle beneath the counter. "You'd best stay dumb on this, kid. I been raided onct already. Lookee here, my lass," he went on, as he carefully filled the bottle. "Look round here to-morrow night, will you? Practise your steps, all the little twiddle bits, and there'll be a supper for you on the house."

"P'raps," said Pansy casually, as she paid for the brandy and turned to the door, tearing with her white teeth at the fat sandwich the cowboys had cut for her.

Just as she reached the entrance, the old rip from the corner glided along the wall and laid black-edged talons on her arm.

"You come and meet me here to-morrow night," he whispered. "Never you mind what these cowboys say. I'm a real friend to little girls. Half-past seven, eh? I could find you an opening — such a

blooming little nectarine as you are . . ." He pinched her cheek greedily.

Pansy shot him a provocative, tantalizing glance under her thick lashes as she slammed through the doors.

4

"What time are you starting, boy?" enquired Aunt Nettie of Darrell Carless at lunch.

He looked up from a handful of typewritten business letters. "Get away about half-past two, I hope," he murmured vaguely. "Must answer two or three of these in writing before I start." He sighed. "Who'd have thought running a ranch meant so much clerk's work? If I'm not glued to James' desk, I'm pushing that tin can along the roads. I haven't had a ride since, Lord, last Tuesday!"

His eyes wandered out of the window, where on the opposite side of the house from the Lake, the grey plain in its winter sleep stretched bleakly to a horizon of gathering clouds.

"I've had another of these letters of condolence about you," said Aunt Nettie, seeking to recall his thoughts, "let's hope it's the last."

Darrell turned back to the table with a faint smile. "Pile of trouble one dam silly news agency can cause. You'd have thought poor old James was well known enough and myself unimportant enough for them not to make me die in hospital instead of him. Think it was a case, Aunt, of the wish being father to the thought? For I realise now I'll never be the man of business or the manager James was. Therefore, as owner of Misted Lake Ranch, I'm not such a sound proposition for this countryside."

"You'd be up to the job," said Aunt Nettie, in a resigned tone, "if your heart was in it."

Darrell turned restlessly to the window again, crumbling his bread in fingers that drooped with discouragement. "A misfit, I'm afraid, Aunt," he replied. "Perhaps, after all, I was made to be a vagabond."

"Are you selling out, then?" asked the old lady sharply, peering at him through her gold spectacles.

He started. "Selling out? Good Lord, no! How you jump to conclusions, Aunt Nettie! I hadn't got as far as thinking of that."



"But you will, Darrell, so why not get it over?"

"You advise me to sell, *you*, Aunt?"

"I do. I love the place. It's the Carless' own place, if making gives any title. I hoped it would go on and prosper, be ours for generations. But not as things are. A lonely man, ageing on a decaying farm," she shuddered. "Better let fresh blood in, even if it isn't Carless blood. You won't hold this place together, my boy — I'm going to be straight with you — and I'm going over the river too soon now to worry."

His wandering eyes came back to hers. "You used to urge me to marry," he said with the shadow of a laugh.

"I did. It was the right advice then. Now it's too late. You were wounded then. Now, you're smashed."

He saw the tears suddenly run out of her eyes. Her armour of hardness gave way and she sat there, sobbing helplessly.

He came over to her side of the table and with an awkward gentleness put his arm round her shoulders. "I'm real sorry, Auntie," he said. "If I could make a better job of things, I would, if only for your sake, and James'. Seems cruel all his work should go to a stranger or else to bits. But, it's just so. I'm the square peg —"

"It's not your fault," sobbed the old lady, "it's *hers*. I hate her! Why couldn't she let you alone? Wasn't once enough to let you down, but she must finish the ruin. *Damn* her! Yes, there, I've said it!" She wiped her eyes with some relief.

Darrell stepped back in surprise. "You knew then?"

"Am I blind? A fool? I know enough! I'd scratch her eyes out."

"Don't talk like that, dear. It shows you don't know enough. You read about that accident at Jorum's Circus; I know you did!"

"*She* was the woman, then? Oh, God help her, poor wretch!" moaned Aunt Nettie brokenly. "But Darrell," she looked up at him puzzled, "in that state you wouldn't leave her, I know, and she couldn't get away from you, surely?"

"That's what she did. I was waiting for her at Salisbury, you may as well know everything, to take her away from it all, that drunken hog of a husband and all the sordidness of her life."

"God forgive you, Darrell, a dreadful thing for you to dream of doing!"

Darrell disregarded her. "She didn't arrive. Then I bought a

paper — and saw. I knew they were hiding something ghastly. I dashed on the next train to Winnipeg. No news; all the big talk in the Press was about that villain Rixen being killed by the horse. Jorum's was all packed up and their trains had left. I could get no information. I rushed round to every hospital and home. Not one of them had her — so they said. Then I tried the newspaper offices. A pal of mine in one of them admitted it was a worse smash than the papers had been let to know — and started in again about Rixen's death. Then I thought I'd try the police; I hoped they might help an old trooper. But as soon as I went to headquarters I was told Superintendent McGaskin was expecting me and wanted to speak to me. That gave me a shock, you can understand. McGaskin was perfectly kind, but perfectly plain. Said her husband had asked for protection against me; I had been pestering his wife with immoral proposals and threatening him, if you please; 'and though,' said McGaskin, 'I don't believe more'n half what that coyote says, I *do* believe half, and you can't expect the police, my boy, to help you, however unofficially, to trail a gent's wife in the circumstances.' He went on to say he respected my family and valued my reputation and career too much not to warn me — oh! you know the stuff, without my telling you."

"And I'm grateful to Mr. McGaskin," said Aunt Nettie stoutly.

"He wasn't burning hot air, either. I started to watch a Home that I had suspicions of. Up comes a plain-clothes cop and warns me away. So I wasted nearly a month, up and down between Winnipeg and here, trying to clear up things after James went out so suddenly. What a ghastly mess!"

"But why did you dash off to the States?"

"To find the old rascal, Jorum. I went to his office in New York; he was on vacation — without address; wouldn't be back for a fortnight. I had to wait. When I saw him he was all butter. Said, of course, it was no longer any affair of his, as Georgin — Madame Dufay had ended her engagement with him; he admitted it was a worse smash than he had allowed the public to know — wished they'd never heard about Rixen, that had queered business for him too; but he thought she ought to be out of hospital in a month; he muttered something about a broken leg — oh, God! if I only *knew* that was all. Then I put it to him square to tell me where I could

find her. 'You forget I'm a moral man,' says he impudently, 'and don't you go for to hit me — I've an electric chucker-out under my foot that'll sift you into Morse code quicker'n blinking.'" Darrell smiled grimly; "I knew he meant it, too. Then he says, 'As I like you, young man, I'll tell you the Riegelmanns' previous address in this city. Nothing committal in that, I reckon. I've not heard they gave up those apartments. They're likely to come home to them when she's well enough to travel. You've got eyes, I reckon, to see when the blinds go up and needn't pester the janitor with fool enquiries.' I watched another three weeks at the address he gave. Then I smelt something wrong and *did* fee the janitor. Flat belonged to an old spinster travelling round the globe. If I hadn't been half-crazy I'd have seen from the first the old rogue was bluffing me."

"That was when you gave up, was it? And came back here to find everything going to ruin."

"That was when I gave up. Not because I'd give Jorum best, or that sodden brute of a husband of hers. But it was borne in on me that if she hadn't let me know where she was so soon as she was well enough to write, it was because she didn't mean me ever to see her again."

"Why so, boy?"

"Can't you understand, Auntie? I suppose you can't. You don't know her and you seem to believe the worst of her."

"Judging by what you tell me, Darrell ——"

"Then let me tell you, and after this, we'll never speak of her again, she wouldn't come to me crippled — or — or disfigured."

He rose with a jerk from the table. "I must see about starting. Have you got your list of what I'm to bring back for you ready?"

When the old lady came to say good-bye to him at the door, he turned to her, pulling on his driving gloves.

"I take it, Aunt," he said with eyes that dared not face her look, "you wouldn't exactly break your heart, then, if I did eventually decide to sell out here?"

"Just what I said, Darrell. I'd sooner see strangers here than a wreck. It's not going to joy my old age to turn out ——"

"I'd make sure you were comfortable."

"Oh! *comfortable!* Yes, Darrell, of course."

"You see, I know you were right when you said I couldn't run Misted Lake — as I am. Well: I'll think it over. Perhaps I'll call in at Ferguson and Fells, the real estate agents and talk to them. . . . I must push for it. I'm making a late start."

The car jarred and whirled away down the curving path to the highroad. The old lady stood rigid before the porch, gazing at the lake.

5

Darrell came out of the office of the real estate agents in discouraged perplexity. He had had more than one circular from Winnipeg agencies asking if he wished to sell Misted Lake Ranch, and promising a high price if he did. Now, when he actually broached the proposition, it appeared that the moment was bad for realising landed property, that the ranch was too large (or alternatively too small), that it was too far from Winnipeg to attract buyers from the neighbourhood and not near enough to the mountains for those in quest of health or scenery . . . he had risen impatiently at last and told old Ferguson that for the present he would defer his decision and not place the property in the market, and then the agent had shown keen disappointment. He felt now quite unable to make up his mind, and that was an added torment to a man of his swift, forthright disposition.

He got into his car and pulled out his business letters to look up the next address he should go to. A round of visits, to the railroad depot, to a stockyard, to a grain warehouse, to a floral seedsman (on Aunt Nettie's account) brought him, as the winter afternoon began to darken, to a farm on the outskirts, where he had to make an enquiry about the character of a cowhand who had applied to him for a job. When, after that, he switched on the lamps of his car and drove the nearest way back into the city, he suddenly felt acute hunger. He had hurried breakfast and cut out lunch. The cold seemed to seize on him through his wrappings and the idea of a hot drink was grateful. Steering cautiously down a bad street of small grey buildings, his eye was caught by the lights of a good-sized road house with the name McGlisky. He stopped and went into the dance hall for a drink.

The sight of laid tables and the clatter of cutlery made him change his plan. It looked as if a decent meal could be had and he decided to look no further for his supper. After giving his order, he took his hot coffee to a corner table behind an iron pillar and sat down to wait.

Leaning back with his head against the varnished matchboarding of the wall, between a gaudy advertisement of tinned soups and a striped railway poster, he watched the shifting groups round the counter and tables with half-closed eyes, hearing their talk and laughter like the rumble of distant waters. He was prostrated by fatigue, not the fatigue of bodily labour, but the exhaustion of long spiritual strain. At no time in his hard, adventurous life, full of disappointments and sudden catastrophes, not when he had been shot up by horse thieves on the American border and had to let them escape, to the ruin, as he thought, of his prospects as a trooper of police; not when Barlowe had dismissed him from his circus and he saw no chance of employment or bread in the stone desert of London; not even when Rixen had poisoned his horse in Paris and Georgy had rejected him had he felt this sinister grey emptiness of existence. Always some hope, some defiance of destiny, if nothing more consoling offered, had upheld him, had driven the wheels forward again into fresh scenes and work. Now the wheels had run down; he simply could not summon a fresh effort. There seemed nothing for it but a shot from his gun — and yet, illogically enough, a contemptuous disgust of suicide prevented him even considering that issue except in scorn.

Not even the purpose of revenge had been left him. He would have exulted to stand on the scaffold after killing Rixen, but Rixen had been paid out — by one who perhaps owed him an even more terrible debt. Aimlessly his mind ran over the shocking details he had heard during his wait in New York from Ethel Vaughan and her husband. The Rixen troupe had broken up, and Ethel had speedily married an old admirer, a scene shifter at a New York vaudeville house. She had been able to tell him nothing about Georgy, when he met her at a circus agent's where he was dogging professionals for scraps of news; but at dinner in her husband's little apartment she had told him freely the memories of her childhood; how in the gipsy camp in the Forest of Fontainebleau she

had seen Joe drench himself in Jockey Club scent before going into Patrico's rude stable of canvas armed with loaded whips and sharp steel prongs. . . . Yes, he had taken everything from that horse, all the simple happiness of his life, permanently darkened and twisted his rudimentary consciousness — even Georgy's kindness had never restored his confidence or tranquillity. That was worse, it seemed to Darrell, than the murder of the besotted Robertshaw, whose neck had been broken in the first violent buck of the terrified horse when the wind carried to his nostrils from his new rider's person the scent associated with his hideous torture. Again Rixen had used his devilish secret for infuriating the horse, in order to shatter the frame of the woman who had despised him and to consummate the ruin of two lives. In what state Georgy, if she still lived, was dragging out the remainder of her days, what consolation, what staff to uphold her she might have found, Darrell did not know; "but to me," he thought, "Rixen has done all he did to Patrico . . . yes . . . he has crushed out all the happiness of living . . . and I would have been justified in killing him, if the horse had not."

Feeling himself beginning to shake with aimless hatred of the dead man, Darrell forced his eyes open and sat up. As he did so words came to his ears from a table half out of sight behind the iron pillar hung with hats and coats.

"She's a little sport," were the words, "she'll come for the sake of the spree and she won't be afraid."

Darrell looked with disgust at the speaker, a seedy old man with watery, lecherous eyes. The sniggering tone in which he had spoken had given evil meaning to his remark.

Another voice answered. "But vill she come vithout getting her mother's leave? A kinchin like that can't sign an engagement that will hold her."

Darrell, glancing round the curve of the pillar, caught a momentary glimpse of a ruddy Jewish face with a flash of gold-stopped tooth and a frizzle of black hair running off a low forehead.

"Never you mind about signing an engagement, Dan," wheezed the older man. "As for holding her," he sniggered, "I'll do the holding. You'll see the kid'll be mad to come — food, clothes, a



leettle money in her pocket and — me to make a fuss of her. She won't even go back to say good-bye to mamma."

"But *can* she dance?"

"If you like, you can make her fit to lick any of these blasted Roossians, Dan. And it's not only that. She's got *It*. Already! Well, I'm not the man, am I, to get all stirred up like by the first kid I see with a skipping rope on the pavement? Not much! I'm an old-timer, what?"

Again came that titter which rasped even Darrell's deadened nerves into exasperation. All his old police instincts were revived in mistrust of this dialogue, and in a sense of responsibility for checking the plot he vaguely discerned.

"Now you don't vant to behave like an old pig, Mitchinson," he heard the Jew say; then the landlord intervened with a clatter of dishes, bringing his supper, and even his professionally sharpened ears could not catch what followed.

When the landlord at last went away, after asking what else he would take to drink, Darrell to his impatience found his view of the table round the pillar further impeded by a group of tall Scandinavian labourers, talking loudly and swinging their bulky frames as they looked round for a vacant place. When, after some minutes, they saw one and made their way between the chairs to the further end of the hall, Darrell felt by his detective sense rather than saw that there was a third party at the sinister little corner conference.

"You can have hot coffee, my tear," said the Jew ingratiatingly, "or lemon squeeze: old Mac won't serve you anything livelier — he daren't, not to you!"

"Oh! Hell!" drawled a clear little voice that made Darrell jump by its thrilling familiarity, yet a familiarity he could not account for, "I'm sure sick of being treated like a kid."

"Well, you won't be treated like one any longer, if you come with us," answered Mitchinson thickly. "Be a little lady, have everything your own way — servants of your own, I dessay."

"Aw, who you roasting?" enquired the little girl's voice. "Think I'll fall for that. What is it you and the shonk here really want with me? Don't squeeze my foot with your smelly hoof, Santa Claus!"

Darrell, shaking with excitement, though he still could not explain the cause of it, tried hard to peer round the corner, but the iron post blocked his way. He could see the top of a knitted toque and then a lean brown arm, protruding from a worn wind-breaker, which hung over the back of a chair, the tiny hand swinging and snapping masterful fingers. Who was she? *Who* was she? And, by what means could he stop the frame-up?

"Ve thought," said the Jew, "that you might like to join a first-class dancing troupe that's going to all the principal theatres of South America, and then p'raps to Europe. My friend Mitchinson says you dance fine."

"Mitchinson," said the girl thoughtfully, "that's his name, is it?"

"Yes, and I don't even know yours," whined the elder villain.

"I'm too poor to give anything away," retorted the child. "You, Sheeny, would my Mom come with us?"

"Ve couldn't take her. But, of course you could write, and send her part of your vages from every place. Goot money, you'd be drawing."

"I'd be a parent to you," leered Mitchinson.

"Nix on the deal!" said the little girl scornfully. "Think I'll bite on that soft stuff? Come again, Mister!"

"Perhaps," said the Jew diplomatically, "your Mom, if she knew, wouldn't vant to stand in your vay. It's a grand opening for a kid like you."

"How'm I going to look after her a thousand miles away?" enquired the child testily.

"How you goin' to keep her from starvin' now, since you say she can't work?" asked Mitchinson cunningly. "You *and* her, for that matter. Don't think you can keep on raking in the bits here with your untrained dancing. The novelty'll wear off, and anyhow, Mac risks his licence letting you do it. It's gotta stop one time, you know."

"Ve should teach you 'ow to dance properly," tempted the Jew.

"We'd teach you lots of things," assented Mitchinson.

"Oh, Hell!" said the child again perplexedly, and withdrew her hand, Darrell felt, to bite her torn finger nails. Instinct told him that the critical moment had come. He must intervene now or he would come too late. But on what pretext could he thrust himself

into the discussion? He was still in blankness on that point as he rose from his seat and passed round the pillar to confront the party.

"Pansy!"

At his cry the two men looked up at him with drooping mouths of surprise. Pansy stared from her piercing black eyes, her smudged eyebrows drawn together. Then she gave a squeak of laughter and wriggled her thin shoulders as she closed her lips on the straw of her lemon squash. "The sheikh who glued on to Mom at the circus!" she ejaculated.

"Friend of yours?" asked the Jew in bewilderment.

"Don't I tell you, *Mom's* sheikh, not mine, Fried Fis?"

"You a friend of this little lady's mother?" asked Mitchinson with a certain tension.

Darrell's heart was pounding; he could hardly speak. While he moistened his lips for utterance, Pansy spoke again.

"If he's her friend, he's the one she's been dodging ever since she slid the Gap last fall."

"Then," said the Jew more boldly, "I don't understand by vat right you cut in on us like this."

"Bloody, infernal cheek!" growled Mitchinson.

Darrell, with shaking knees, stammered incoherently.

"Shunt!" said the Jew. "Are you deaf? Ve don't vant your improving conversation."

"Wait a bit," said Mitchinson, still regarding Darrell with a suspicious eye. "S'pose, Dan, you and me took our little friend along to your place? You ain't afraid to go, my dear, are you? You're not one of them frightened little fools. We don't seem to be able to talk private here."

The Jew reached for his hat; Pansy flattened her beret on her curls, and Darrell suddenly awoke to strength and purpose. Swiftly he decided to take a big risk.

"You gentlemen'll stop here," he said authoritatively. "I am Detective Taylor, and I'll take this child to her parent." And as the Jew stood hesitating and incredulous, he leant towards him and said in a low, confident tone:

"The cards are stacked against you, this time, Dan! This kid's not going under Number 5 contract to Buenos Ayres."

The Jew turned yellow. "Vat are you gassing about? I don't understand."

"Mount to the fourth storey, rattle the door handle and say 'King Solomon's Signet,' " suggested Darrell, playing at a desperate venture his knowledge of the local underworld and its jargon — knowledge that might be out of date already, and yet might still serve his turn.

The Jew sank back on his chair with a beaded face. "Let this beggar go, Mitchinson," he said. "It's not true vat he thinks, but I — I don't vant to argue vith him."

"Are you charging us, Officer?" quavered Mitchinson, his cheeks grey with terror.

Darrell turned a severe eye on him, and then, seizing Pansy by the shoulders, propelled her through the swing doors into the street.

"Tell *me!*" she exclaimed, wriggling as soon as they crossed the threshold. "Detective Taylor! You ain't no cop, Mr. Man — "

"I've copped you!" cried Darrell, in a wild revulsion of joy, and catching up the baby he hugged and kissed her crazily.

"Well, save some for Mom, won't you?" she gasped, as she struggled free. "Guess I don't want to pinch her beau — and you ain't my type, either."

Darrell laid a heavy hand on her shoulder, suddenly sobered and trembling again.

"You're going to take me to her, Pansy," he pleaded in a whisper. "At once, oh! quickly, dear!"

"I should smile. Can't go too quick for me." She paused. "But say, won't she hand you the ice jug? Hain't she been dodging you since her smash?"

"Let me get my arms round her, dear, and she won't dodge me again!"

"Well, I'll tell the world you're some lemon squeezer." She darted one of her sharp glances at him. "It's on the level, eh? You'll look after her? . . . Then I hand over my reesponsibilities to you, Mister." She ruffled her thick black locks under the beret. "Guess I've been pulling the grey ones in bunches every mawnin'. I want a little life of my own now, thank you."

## CLOSE UP

DARRELL CARLESS stood by the gate of the horse corral, looking through the powdered gold of the spring morning at the single horseman coming up the road.

"I know him," he mused. "He reminds me — no, it can't be, but by the Lord, it *is*!"

He let out a shrill cattleman's hail, and a thin voice of greeting came back along the road. The lank figure on the horse grew plainer and Darrell dashed down the path to meet him.

"Birlingham!" he shouted, pumping his arm up and down. "Gee, ain't this scrumptious. And you've come on a —" he started, "no, it isn't, it *can't* be, Frank!"

"It is though!" Birlingham, grinning broadly, threw a long leg, elegantly breeched and booted, over the saddle and came to grass. "That's her old moke, sure enough!"

"Knight! Knight!" exclaimed Carless incredulously. "How *did* you find him? — And he looks fine!"

"Ought to, with the trouble I've taken with him since I bought him. Saw him in the spectacle number, my last engagement with Jorum. Scraped the old file down all I could to get him. But not much, soon as he saw I needed him. . . . No, no, Darrell. Don't be an ass: you won't pay, it's my wedding present." He paused apprehensively. "I'm not too late, or too *early*?"

Darrell grinned in his turn. "Not too early, thank the Lord."

"Master Otto?"

"Georgy got her decree in the old country last year. We resided in London till the lawyers put it through. . . . No, Otto never showed up; he's not been heard of. Plenty of evidence, though."

"And your wedding?"

"Just before Christmas. So we won't say you're late, either."

"Heaps of the best, old lad!"

"Same to you. You're going bald, though, Frank!"

"I like that. You're as grey as — . Sorry, Darrell, I'm a blasted fool. After the punishment you had to take — "

"It's cheap, old boy! Pansy was afraid she was going grey too!" He chuckled.

"Kid on the ranch with you?"

"No." Darrell looked a little graver. "You can't fight character, Birlingham. She wasn't made for it. She's at Montreal, training under old Cavalletti, man that used to drill the Russian Ballet. He says she's turning out fine . . . and he beats her, which is mighty good for her. And yet, Pansy's a brick, if she is the most unnatural kid I know."

"How does the missus take it?"

"Sees it has to be. It makes her sad, though."

"I don't suppose you let her mope much. Tell me. Is she really strong again?"

"You wouldn't believe it possible. She must have a constitution — "

"Really blooming, is she? The air suits her and the life, what?"

"It's the right life for her."

"Works on the farm, does she, bless her! Walks, rides — "

"No." A shadow came over Darrell's face. "She don't ride. Can't feel any confidence . . . after what she had to lose. The leg they made her looks all right, but it's awkward."

"Pity!" said Birlingham. "I hoped they'd left enough to grip with, seeing what riding means to her. Still, you've a car?"

"Three!"

"Boom in mangel-wurzels, eh?"

"Oh, farming's pretty good. Pity old Aunt Nettie didn't live to see . . . However . . ."

Birlingham was propping himself against a post. Darrell broke off his reverie. "What a brute I am. You must be tired!"

"Pretty! Rode the old boy the last three days — exercise for him and me."

He gathered the reins over his arm. "He's got go in him still, whatever his age," he said, surveying Knight.

"Put him in the corral," said Darrell. "The boys'll tend him. Fact is, if you lead him straight up to Georgy like this — "



"Bit of a shock, what?"

"No harm to prepare her. Knight was a brother to her, more'n just a horse, you know." He patted the old bay's long, wise muzzle. "And you were a friend to me too, weren't you, Knight? Always seemed to favour my wooing somehow, Birlingham."

"I believe you," said the clown, "though there's hundreds wouldn't."

"Meet Mrs. Darrell Carless," said his host, as a slow step came down the path. "It's too late to keep our secret, Frank!"

\* \* \* \* \*

The sun was setting over the prairie, sharpening the horizon edge to a rim of purple cardboard, veiling the hollows of the little lakes with blue gauze, as Carless and Birlingham returned at a swinging gallop from their long afternoon ride over the estate, their hoofs thudding crisply on the grass in the biting crystalline air that bathed the close of the spring day.

"Champagne at every breath!" panted Birlingham. "Pull up a minute, old man. I'm getting a stitch. You forget I'm a townee, not a plainsman; this saddle's no armchair to me."

Darrell obediently slowed to a walk, and rounding the curve of the little conical hill, they saw Misted Lake, its trailing vapours shot with crimson reflections between the black stems of the spruce.

"Somebody coming riding!" said Darrell alertly, and looked up the swell of the ground where the track ran over.

They could hear a horse's beat at a steady lope coming towards them behind the crest, and with a perplexed mutter, "Who the deuce can it be?" Darrell cantered forward to meet the unseen rider, Birlingham following close behind.

The three met on the crest of the little rise and both men gave a roar.

"Georgy!" exclaimed Darrell. "It *can't* be you!"

"And on old Knight!" clamoured Birlingham. "I hoped it, but I daren't believe it! Darrell, this trick goes to me. I've put her in the saddle again!"

Georgy's grey eyes, that seemed larger in the thinness of her face, were shining with glee. Her lips were parted, as she gazed almost mischievously at her husband.

"George!" he said reproachfully. "I've never made you look as happy as this!"

"Don't scold her, you ass!" cried Birlingham. "Her foot is in her native stirrup, her name ——"

Darrell laughed round at him. "I can tell her name all right. But are you safe, darling?"

"Quite!" she panted. "Oh, Darrell, I was a fool to be so afraid. Knight simply made me get up. . . . Oh, the boys had to help me on, of course; but, once there, I felt like a rock. I can grip all right! Frank!" She slapped both her boots with her quirt. "Which leg is it that . . . ?"

"Upon my honour," said Birlingham, taking off his hat, "I don't know, and it doesn't seem to me to matter."

"There!" She triumphed loudly. "Darrell, I can ride to ——"

"To supper!" He caught Knight's rein, and pulled him firmly round. In the trembling dew-laden air, trees and fields were turned to a Quaker grey and a pale dust of prairie stars glimmered overhead. The lake was a scarf of ghostly mist. From the dim shape of the house, yellow lights began to twinkle; and there was a sound of singing from the bunk house where the cowboys were preparing for supper.

"Ride on!" said Darrell. Birlingham came up on the other side of her and between the two she let Knight carry her home.

THE END